

VOICES OF VISN 6

— Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here —



WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Uses drive-through clinic to vaccinate Veterans

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By Vance Janes | CHARLES GEORGE VA, WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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ASHEVILLE, NC — The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System pushed more than 1,100 vaccines to Veterans Saturday, March 27, during a mass-vaccination effort at Charles George VA Medical Center.

The Health Care System has provided more than 10,000 vaccines to Veterans and staff since first receiving the Moderna Vaccine in late December. Since that time, it is now providing first and second doses of the Pfizer Vaccine. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has also been used at the Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Rutherford County, Franklin and Hickory North Carolina.

In an effort to get as many Veterans vaccinated as want it, the Health Care System has removed all restrictions and is now vaccinating all enrolled Veterans regardless of age, profession or medical conditions.

And getting vaccinated starts with a simple phone call.

Veterans call the Charles George VA Medical Center at (828) 298-7911, extension 4436, and they are either scheduled for an appointment, or they can leave a message, and the staff will call them back.

Getting the shot has also been simplified.

Once an appointment is made, the Veterans drive up to the outdoor shot clinic tents, where they are checked in and provided the vaccination. Once they get the shot, they pull over to a designated area to wait for 15 minutes while an EMT monitors them. Then they are off on their way.



MESSAGE FROM OUR ACTING NETWORK DIRECTOR

Not so long ago, VA questioned whether Veterans were receiving the care they needed when and where they needed it. In the last year, VA has demonstrated superior proficiency in how quickly its excellent care is delivered.

We've shown that VA can turn on a dime. A year ago, we created a new lexicon and developed new guidelines and protocols for people that immediately went into effect; mind you, the coronavirus pandemic was in its American infancy. We quickly adapted to new rules, restrictions, procedures, repurposed spaces, virtual appointments, etc. Intrepid clinical practitioners and researchers found room in their workspaces to try new things and apply what they knew to what they didn't know. Innovation flourished. It had to. We found ways to restrict access but keep things moving.

We redefined priorities but continued to serve successfully. We have managed to move forward and reopen some spaces, enabling more personal, in-person visits. And we have coped with the physical restructuring necessary to take care of our most serious patient conditions while simultaneously battling COVID and sending recovered Veterans back home to their families. Our transition to vaccination was epic. To date, we have vaccinated more than 225,000 Veterans, growing every day. Now, with the Strengthening and Amplifying Vaccination

Efforts to Locally Immunize All Veterans and Every Spouse Act, known as the SAVE LIVES Act, VA is moving the bar again.

As many of you already know, the [SAVE LIVES Act allows VA to soon provide COVID-19 vaccinations to all Veterans, their spouses, and caregivers.](#) The Act increases the number of people eligible to receive a vaccine through VA from 9.5 to 33 million, prompting VA Secretary McDonough to advise, "Meeting the task of vaccinating this expanded population will be a tremendous undertaking for the VA and will require a significant increase in our allocation of vaccine supply, but I am confident that VA's workforce is up to the task." Yet, we have already begun doing it. Within days of President Biden's signature on the bill, VHA had instructions and a process to carry out the unprecedented mandate.

We are prepared to process as many as we can in the easiest way possible for everyone. Our staff are agile and resilient. We are superior performers. We turn every challenge into an opportunity. So, beginning with Asheville on March 27, we began administering vaccine doses to spouses, caregivers, and Veterans who otherwise may not have received the VA vaccine. All of our facilities have amended their protocols and adjusted practices, so we are prepared to vaccinate everyone we can.

Stephanie Young | *Acting VA Mid Atlantic Health Care Network Director, VISN 6*

Fayetteville PTSD Team Receives National Recognition

A VA health care team from Southeastern North Carolina recently received national kudos for work they do to help Veterans heal. The Fayetteville PTSD clinic, through the leadership of Dr. Jeff Jones, was recognized by the National Center for PTSD Mentoring Program for their progress and improvements.

Dr. Jones attributes the cause for attention, “Most importantly, [to] the Trauma Specialty Program (TSP) team members’ commitment to increasing the use of evidence-based therapies since before the [Coronavirus] pandemic began.” While that may be true, the humble leader was singled out in a statement by the program for his inspirational direction. “We clearly recognized his commitment to the mission of PTSD specialty care and commitment to ongoing process improvements.”

Dr. Jones points to the team’s dedication and its opportunity to optimize newly available technologies, like VA Video Connect (VVC) to strengthen team members’ cohesion and to more completely engage Veterans during the COVID-19 era. “When the clinic went all-remote early during the pandemic, we supported one another through

virtual treatment team meetings,” Jones said. The team also relied on research suggesting that evidence-based therapies can be effectively delivered remotely.

The team embraced the opportunity, capitalizing on increased availability and authoritative guidance to expand VVC use. Dr. Jones said the team could offer evidence-based psychotherapies



The Fayetteville PTSD team is: Pictured (top to bottom, l-r): Shondell Hawkins, LCSW, Dr. Elliott Fitzpatrick, Shelia Leese-Roberts, LCSW, Natasha Dickenson, MSA, Omar Nichols, PSS, Dr. Susan Sheu, Dr. Jeffrey Jones, Heather Hennessey, PSS. **Not Pictured:** Dr. Shavern Browne, Dr. Kailey Carlson, Dr. Rebecca Gellman

to motivated Veterans at remote locations where in-person appointments previously may have been a challenge.

The mentoring program staff added that, “The steady work of your PTSD team has resulted in clear improvements in the percentage of your Veterans with PTSD who engaged evidence-based and measurement-based care.”

Fayetteville Executive Director Dan Dücker, among many VISN leaders chiming in with congratulations, excitedly greeted the team, encouraging them to “keep doing what you do,” noting the growth in service reflected in steady gains for each of the six last quarters. The mentoring program staff concluded, noting “We recognize the countless additional stressors and burdens that the field is experiencing [due to the COVID-19 epidemic], which makes your accomplishments all the more impressive.”

Dr. Jones says that there are opportunities they have learned that will be available on which to capitalize after the pandemic breaks. “We anticipate the importance of maintaining a strong ability to continue to offer VVC-based therapies even after pandemic restrictions lift,” he says, which he believes should enable them to continue the performance and growth.



Salem Social Worker Helps Community Pantries Adjust to Pandemic

By Rosaire Bushey

SALEM VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Homelessness and food insecurity are not Veteran-specific issues, so working together with the local community provides social workers like Jeremy Floyd, the Housing Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUDVASH) Case Manager, an opportunity to help Veterans who may be in either or both of these categories.

Floyd has been working with Feeding Southwest Virginia (FSV) to coordinate disaster-relief food boxes, and because of the pandemic, the last year has seen a shift in the way food pantries typically operate. As Case Manager for HUDVASH, Floyd works both to assist with housing and food insecurity issues for Veterans throughout the area.

“The food pantries have had to adjust their distribution process to keep up with the increase in demand and need for assistance as well as social distancing and COVID-19 precautions for safety and this presents a challenge for homeless Veterans,” Floyd says. “Veterans and the general population had difficulty before navigating resources, but with COVID-19, even more so now.”

Floyd has been working with distribution sites and engaging with FSV to set up boxes specifically for homeless Veterans. The collaboration has worked to fill a vital food need throughout the onset of the pandemic.

“The Ridge Continuum of Care — the region’s local planning group working to end homelessness — has seen a slight increase of inflow of Veterans into the Roanoke area since the pandemic

PHOTO ABOVE: HUDVASH Case Manager Jeremy Floyd has been working to coordinate disaster-relief food boxes on behalf of Veterans who may be facing homelessness and/or food insecurity.

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Salem Social Worker Helps Community Pantries Adjust to Pandemic

began,” he explains. “This increase has really led the whole community to work together even more to provide necessary resources. Grants in the local government and federal government, as well as Total Action for Progress — a community action agency that serves 11 locations in the Roanoke Valley, have stepped in and are vital for offering assistance.”

The funding from these sources helps both civilians and Veterans who have issues ranging from homelessness to risk of eviction or assistance with utilities.

“They (TAP) have been a huge asset for us and the community,” Floyd says. “The pandemic has resulted in job markets being affected which is a huge burden on the local employment commission. A lot of people have been forced to make tough choices, like paying for food or rent. A lot of people choose food, as they wonder where their next meal will come from or how they will make it through the week.”

Food insecurity is not a one-time event, but rather a weekly or monthly issue. Pre-pandemic people sought assistance at sites such as food pantries, the Salvation Army, or faith-based providers. But the pandemic meant more people were using these services and what normally would have been a 30-minute food pantry visit sometimes turned into 3 hours during peak influx.

“We reached out to FSV and said, ‘Look, we haven’t seen this before. What can you offer?’ Their response was amazing,” Floyd says. “They worked with us for a couple months and helped with emergency packages. They had their suppliers who donated a lot of things and packaged for Veterans, and we took some fleet vehicles and distributed these packages to Veterans on our caseload. Since then, FSV appears in the community with a food truck and hands out food packages.”

To meet the challenge of providing aid in a pandemic, Floyd says the program follows protocols that involve screening Veterans as

well as sanitation and cleaning for vehicles and personal protective equipment for staff.

“Some days you’re suited up like you’re going into the OR,” Floyd says. “We have masks, gloves, and face shields in the kits for Veterans and employee protection. It has been a year now with these protocols, and it’s starting to become second nature — it’s part of life now, and it’s odd if you don’t have some of these safety things in place, or if your gloves or mask isn’t on, you feel as if something is missing or out of place.”

Since the beginning of the pandemic, many agencies have adapted to the new normal and have systems in place to distribute aid. But help is still needed.

“Food pantries will always need people to volunteer with time or donations,” Floyd suggests. “Roanoke Area Ministries, FSV, and Christian Soldiers are local communities that have places for donations, so people should check with their local communities to find out where and when donations can be accepted.”

Hampton VA Medical Center Opens Two Mass-Vaccination Clinics

By John Rogers

HAMPTON VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

In addition to Hampton VA Medical Center’s on-site vaccination clinics, on March 8, 2021, Hampton VAMC began giving COVID-19 vaccinations (Janssen and Moderna) to Veterans at Hampton University’s Convocation Center. Moreover, on March 17, 2021, Hampton VAMC began administering COVID-19 vaccinations to Veterans at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) facility in Norfolk, Virginia.

“In addition to Moderna, Hampton VAMC is eager to be able to offer Janssen, a third highly effective vaccine to more Veterans,” said John Rogers, Public Affairs Officer. “This one-dose vaccine will help us reach our

ultimate goal of offering COVID-19 vaccinations to all Veterans and employees who want to be vaccinated.” In collaboration with Hampton University and the Norfolk VFW, we can provide greater access to vaccines.

Dr. Michelle Penn-Marshall, Hampton University Vice President for Research, said the decision to provide support to Hampton VA Medical Center supports a priority of boosting vaccinations, however possible.

“As a Historically Black College and University we are trusted in the communities of color, so that assists in minimizing hesitancy,” she said. “We are going to work with VA to ensure that as many Veterans have the ability to get vaccinated can do so at this Convocation

Center,” Penn-Marshall said.

Dr. Taquisa Simmons, Hampton VAMC Executive Director said, “the Johnson & Johnson shot provides more flexibility for Veterans who many do not have easy access to a second vaccination appointment”. She also stated that Hampton is here for the long haul and we hope to get as many Veterans through our system as possible at these locations.

In accordance with CDC guidelines, Hampton VAMC is currently offering vaccinations to enrolled Veterans 60 years of age and older. Hampton VAMC is pleased to be able to open things up and as things progress and supply increases, we will be able to do more.



RIGHT PHOTO: RN Joyce DeHaven goes over vaccination procedures prior to vaccinating a Veteran. LEFT PHOTO: Medical Support Assistants stand by to assist Veterans. (Photos by John Rogers, Public Affairs Officer)



PHOTO ABOVE: The team that took care of Charles Toler, from left: Dr. David Boone, Amada Montoya, RN, Toler, Kari Bocock, RN, Deborah Goodman, RN, and Dr. Ed Humerickhouse. Not pictured are Hugh Elsea, RN, and Bob Gibson, the Housekeeper who works in the HCI unit. (Photo by Rosaire Bushey)

Marine Veteran, VAMC Employee, Celebrates Anniversary of Historic First

By Rosaire Bushey | SALEM VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

A year ago, March 28, 2020, Marine Veteran and Salem VA Medical Center Housekeeper Charles Roy Toler Jr., made history in a most unenviable way — he became the first patient admitted to the Salem VA Medical Center High Consequence Infection (HCI) unit for COVID-19.

“I remember I had a cough that wouldn’t go away, and I kept it for about two weeks,” Toler recalls. “I get headaches, and the coughing aggravated the headaches and I wanted it to go away, and my wife said, ‘You might have COVID,’ so I checked into the ER not thinking I had it at all. I was just being a good soldier and doing what my wife told me to do.

“They (the ER staff) took me right in and I started feeling sick in the ER,” he continues. “They put me in a special room and about that time I felt like I had to throw up. So, I got up and the next thing I knew I was waking up on the floor — I had just passed out. But I got up and threw up in a trash can, which is where I was heading when I got up the first time.”

From that point, Toler was given a nasal swab and sent to the COVID unit.

“I had never seen the unit until that point,” Toler says, “and everybody is all dressed in PPE and gowns, and the doctor came in and introduced himself and then told me the worst-case scenario of what I could expect: worsening cough, rising fever. Fortunately, I didn’t get any of it. Then he told

me, ‘If it comes down to it, I will stand on your chest and give you compressions. I won’t give up on you.’ He broke it all down Barney-style for me, which I appreciated. Sometimes you have to do that with Marines.”

While he was in the hospital, Toler’s wife and two daughters were worried that if he got COVID-19, they might get it as well. Realistically, he said, he probably had it for a couple weeks before coming to the ER, so there was concern for the rest of the family.

“They never had any symptoms. It’s strange, especially for my wife because we are in the same room at night, but apparently they have good immune systems.”

Toler would only spend a few days in the HCI unit before heading home to spend 14 days in quarantine.

“Honestly, that was more difficult than being in the hospital,” he remembers. “Fortunately, I had a separate room and bathroom, so I didn’t have to go into the other part of the house, and my wife gowned up to bring me food and told me not to leave that room. Everyone was isolated from me — and I’m a family-oriented person, I’ve got to have everybody near me when I’m at home. You get used to a certain ebb and flow of things, and when that gets altered it throws you off — it was definitely the hardest part because I was at home but still couldn’t see them.”

Looking back from his one-year anniversary, Toler thinks the care he received at

Salem was on par with any he would get in the community.

“The nurses were professional, and I tried to be a good patient,” he says. “I think they tried to match my sense of humor and it made it feel more natural to me because that’s how I vent my frustrations. My nurse that first day matched my personality and humor perfectly.

“I’d like to thank them all for putting up with me, and for their care and professionalism, and thanks to the doctor for being so straight-forward,” he offers. “To those people who might be not feeling well, get tested! You hear so much in the media about people putting it off until they’re in the hospital and it’s almost too late.

“At the first sign you think something might be a wee bit off, get tested,” Toler urges. “Yeah, it’s uncomfortable, but it only lasts a second and you’ve got peace of mind that if you do have it, you’ve hopefully caught it early, so it won’t be as big an issue than if you’d waited another month.”

A year after making history, Toler says he hasn’t had so much as a sniffle. “Knock on wood.”

'GREAT PRIDE IN THEIR WORK' – Charlottesville VA Clinic 'a Godsend' for Local Veterans

By Tim Parish | CENTRAL VIRGINIA VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

As the nationwide rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination continues — just recently, a new vaccine was granted Emergency Use Authorization by the Food and Drug Administration, with more vaccine variants in development — Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) is firing on all cylinders. With four vaccine clinics in operation at least five days a week, nearly 23,000 doses have been administered to Veterans, VA employees and volunteers since vaccinations began before Christmas last year.

For some, the vaccination appointment call could not have come soon enough, especially having already faced and survived one bout of COVID-19. James May Jr., the oldest WWII Veteran in the entirety of Orange County, Va., (population 36,010 as of 2019) received the first round of the Moderna vaccine March 2 at the Charlottesville VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), with Daughter Denise Gipson at his side. Though a recent fight with the coronavirus proved a “breeze” according to Denise, at nearly 97-years young, James May Jr. is one lucky man.

“I’m very, very glad. He had COVID back in November. We were very worried, but he did fantastic,” said Denise, who works with autistic school children in the local community. “We got very lucky, so when they called us for this, we said ‘How quick can you get him in?’ Because we knew it could happen again.”

May, who served in Europe during the war, came home to work in the construction industry, later selling insurance — born and raised in Orange County, May has relied on the VA for health care for years. Before CVHCS expanded services at the Charlottesville CBOC in February 2016, May travelled to the Richmond campus for many health care needs. Now, May need only travel several miles southwest into Charlottesville to seek care through the VA. The convenience is advantageous for May, who is a great-grandfather of two, according to Denise. But the ability to stay off the roads, limiting possible exposure to COVID-19

in larger communities, is heaven sent, said Denise.

“It’s wonderful; they have been a godsend for him,” she said. “We were having to go all the way to Richmond, but now a lot of things he can do right here. There are a lot of things that he still needs to go to the VA for, so it’s really good that they are here in Charlottesville. It’s so much closer.”

Since severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes COVID-19, began spreading across the U.S. last spring, nurses, doctors, administrators, emergency planners, maintenance and sanitation staff, screeners and medical support assistants with CVHCS have focused almost exclusively on the response to the pandemic. It has been an all-hands approach in response to an ever-shifting local, regional and national public health crisis.

Now, with the end hopefully coming into view as widespread vaccinations progress, the Charlottesville CBOC is meeting a critical need for Veterans residing west of the Commonwealth’s capital city. As of March 4, more than 900 Veterans have received at least one dose of the lifesaving Vaccine at the Charlottesville CBOC. The effort is a testament to the focus, care and commitment of the clinic’s staff. And according to retired pastor and U.S. Navy Veteran James Allison, who served aboard the USS *Forrestal* (CV-59) during the Vietnam War, Veterans have taken notice.

“It’s quite an honor; the whole VA system has been excellent for me,” said Allison, who served aboard the *Forrestal* as a gunners’ mate technician from 1969 through 1971. After returning home, Allison joined the textile industry before leading ministry at both the New Bern and Nortonville Churches of God. “I’ve gotten excellent service for everything they’ve offered to me, so I’m very appreciative of it.”

Now living in Dyke, roughly 20-miles north of C-Ville as it is sometimes called, Allison appreciates the systematic approach the CBOC staff have taken since they began the vaccination clinic the third week of

January. While he was anxious to get in line for inoculation, Allison patiently awaited his turn in the vaccination chair.

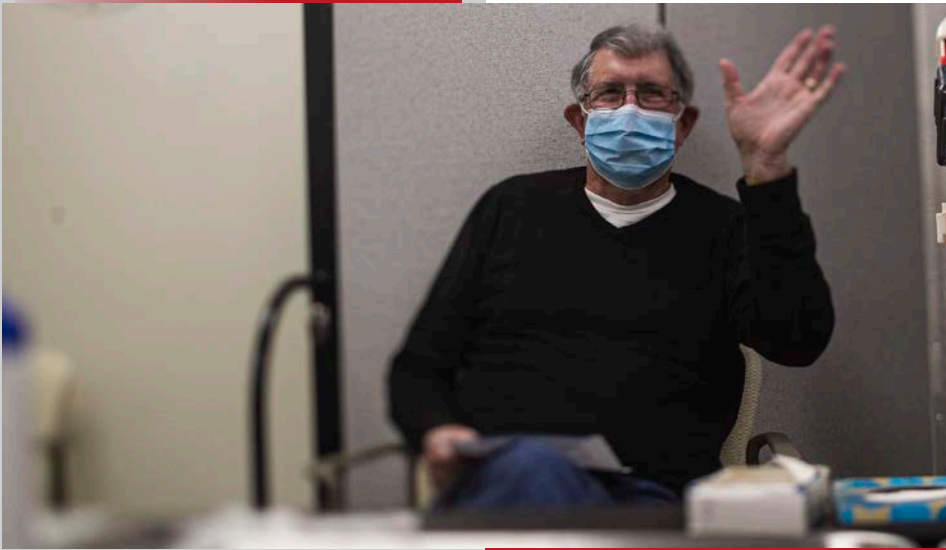
“I think it’s very important that our active duty and health care workers get the vaccine, and I’m thankful that [CBOC staff] have a system set up to take care of those with critical issues and severe health issues,” said Allison. “And the VA was able to work with them first and move down the line. I’m grateful that I have very few health conditions, and I’m satisfied with the fact that I was able to wait for a while.”

With nearly 900 individual doses of the vaccine dispensed to this point, the Charlottesville CBOC staff have been putting as many shots in as many arms as possible for more than a month. The team effort extends outside the confines of the VA. CVHCS has a longstanding affiliation with Virginia Commonwealth University medicine — today, medical professionals-to-be are gaining firsthand experience as part of the nation’s largest, most expansive vaccination effort in history. The experience is unparalleled and the contributions innumerable, according to Vivian Vu, who will graduate from the VCU School of Pharmacy this May.

“I feel very honored to be included in such an important, memorable event in our history, and to be able to do this for our community of Veterans,” said Vu, who grew up in sunny Garden Grove, Calif. “I pursued a career in pharmacy to have opportunities such as this, and to be directly involved in patient care. It is a rewarding feeling to know that we are making a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable patients.”

For Vu, who graduated from University of California-Irvine with a degree in Sociology before moving east to VCU “for a change of scenery,” the teamwork within the Charlottesville CBOC vaccine clinic is indicative of the larger sense of purpose and commitment inside CVHCS as a whole. While the road is a long one, the horizon is coming into view, speeded by the united effort of so many caring health care professionals — and trainees.

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“Everyone that I have worked with at the VA in Charlottesville has been incredibly supportive, knowledgeable, friendly, and takes great pride in their work,” said Vu, who began working the vaccine clinic only a few weeks ago. “At the vaccine clinic, we encourage teamwork by keeping open lines of communication, celebrating successes and working with individual strengths. The staff at our vaccine clinic have a very optimistic and supportive mentality. The positive work culture truly makes working at the VA such a dream. The overall consensus among our Veterans is the feeling of joy and relief that we are that much closer to getting back a bit of normality.”

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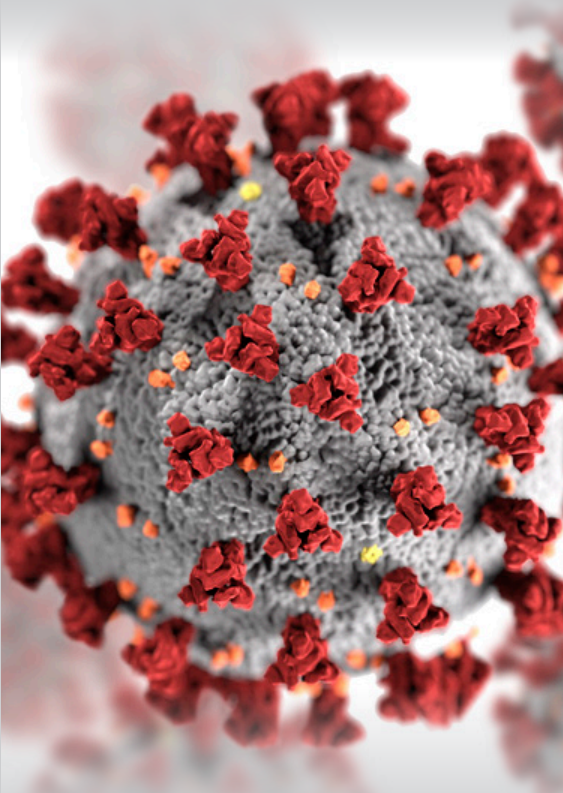
Retired pastor and U.S. Navy Veteran James Allison, who served aboard the *USS Forrestal (CV-59)* during the Vietnam War, received his first COVID-19 vaccination at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) Charlottesville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), March 2, 2021. After serving aboard the *Forrestal* as a gunners’ mate technician from 1969 through 1971, Allison joined the textile industry before leading ministry at both the New Bern and Nortonville Churches of God. Allison, who lives in Dyke, Va., currently receives care as a VA patient at the Charlottesville CBOC. The Charlottesville vaccination clinic staff have been vaccinating Veterans since initiating the COVID-19 vaccine clinic in January of this year. To this point, nurses in the Charlottesville vaccine clinic have provided nearly 900 doses of the lifesaving vaccine for Veterans, employees, volunteers and caregivers. CVHCS began its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. (CVHCS Photo by Tim Parish/Released)

vaccination at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) Charlottesville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), March 2, 2021. May is the oldest WWII Veteran living in Orange County, Va. After WWII, May worked in the construction industry and as an insurance salesman. May’s daughter, Denise Gipson, is grateful for the convenience of the Charlottesville CBOC for Veterans, and for the staff’s continued care for the Veterans of Central Virginia. “It’s wonderful; they have been a godsend for him,” said Gipson, who works with local autistic children as part of the school system. “We were having to go all the way to Richmond, but now a lot of things he can do right here. There are a lot of things that he still needs to go to the VA for, so it’s really good that they are here in Charlottesville, it’s so much closer.” The Charlottesville vaccination clinic staff have been vaccinating Veterans since initiating the COVID-19 vaccine clinic in January of this year. To this point, nurses in the Charlottesville vaccine clinic have provided nearly 900 doses of the lifesaving vaccine for Veterans, employees, volunteers and caregivers. CVHCS began its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. (CVHCS Photo by Tim Parish/Released)



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Denise Gipson and her 96-year-old father, WWII Veteran James May Jr., came to the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) Charlottesville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) for the COVID-19 vaccination March 2, 2021. May is the oldest WWII Veteran living in Orange County, Va. After WWII, May worked in the construction industry and as an insurance salesman. May’s daughter, Denise Gipson, is grateful for the convenience of the Charlottesville CBOC for Veterans, and for the staff’s continued care for the Veterans of Central Virginia. “It’s wonderful, they have been a



210302-0-PJ332-035

Ninety-six-year-old WWII Veteran James May Jr. received his first COVID-19

‘GREAT PRIDE IN THEIR WORK’ – Charlottesville VA Clinic ‘a Godsend’ for Local Veterans

godsend for him,” said Gipson, who works with local autistic children as part of the school system. “We were having to go all the way to Richmond, but now a lot of things he can do right here. There are a lot of things that he still needs to go to the VA for, so it’s really good that they are here in Charlottesville, it’s so much closer.” The Charlottesville vaccination clinic staff have been vaccinating Veterans since initiating the COVID-19 vaccine clinic in January of this year. To this point, nurses in the Charlottesville vaccine clinic have provided nearly 900 doses of the lifesaving vaccine for Veterans, employees, volunteers and caregivers. CVHCS began its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. (CVHCS Photo by Tim Parish/Released)



210302-0-PJ332-061

Virginia Commonwealth University pharmacy student Vivian Vu assists COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic staff at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) Charlottesville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), March 2, 2021. Vu, a native of Garden Grove, Calif., graduated from the University of California-Irvine with a degree in sociology before moving on to Virginia Commonwealth University School of Pharmacy — where she is slated to graduate in May this year. She began working with the Charlottesville CBOC Vaccine Clinic staff last month. The Charlottesville vaccination clinic staff have been vaccinating Veterans since initiating the COVID-19 vaccine clinic in January of this year. To this point, nurses in the Charlottesville vaccine clinic have provided nearly 900 doses of the lifesaving vaccine for Veterans, employees, volunteers and caregivers. CVHCS began its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. (CVHCS Photo by Tim Parish/Released)



210302-0-PJ332-074

Staff with the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) Charlottesville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) prepare for another round of Veteran patients inside the COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic, March 2, 2021. The CBOC staff have been offering the COVID-19 vaccination to Veterans since January of this year. To this point, nurses in the Charlottesville vaccine clinic have provided nearly 900 doses of the lifesaving vaccine for Veterans, employees, volunteers and caregivers. CVHCS began its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. (CVHCS Photo by Tim Parish/Released)

WNC VA Health Care System Offers VEText COVID-19 Direct Scheduling

By Vance Janes | CHARLES GEORGE VA, WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

ASHEVILLE, NC — Do you want to schedule your COVID-19 vaccine? Would you like to do it by simply responding to a text? Well, at Western North Carolina VA Health Care System, you can do just that.

The Health Care System has implemented VEText COVID-19 Direct Scheduling.

Veterans who have signed up for VEText when they enrolled in health care and whose mobile phone number is up to date in our records, will receive an automated text message from VEText number 53079 which reads:

“Charles George VA Medical Center is offering

COVID-19 vaccines to Veterans who receive care at VA.

To schedule an appointment, please reply to this message with a date and time you would be available from First Upcoming Vaccine Clinic Date to Last Date Upcoming Vaccine Clinic.

Send STOP to end messages.”

If the Veteran chooses to schedule an appointment, they simply follow the prompts from the text message on their mobile device to reply with the date of desired appointment within the next two weeks.

If that date is available, the patient will be offered a

specific appointment time that they can schedule by replying with the onscreen option to schedule the appointment. If the Veteran would like to choose a different available date, they can do that, too, by replying with the option to request a different date right from their mobile phone.

If there are no available appointments at this time, the Veteran will receive a reply message stating that there are no appointments available, and to contact the facility for further assistance with scheduling in the future.



SAVE LIVES Act Allows VA to Soon Provide COVID-19 Vaccinations to All Veterans, Their Spouses and Caregivers

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden signed the [SAVE LIVES Act](#) into law today, expanding VA's legal authority to provide COVID-19 vaccines to all Veterans, regardless of their VA health care enrollment status, as well as Veteran spouses, caregivers and some beneficiaries.

The SAVE LIVES Act removed some of the legal limits on the medical care VA can provide to Veterans, based on [health care eligibility](#) and [priority groups](#).

The expanded authority depends on readily available COVID-19 vaccine supply and requires VA to continue to prioritize vaccinations and healthcare delivery for our nation's Veterans enrolled in VA care.

“The SAVE LIVES Act increases the number of individuals who are eligible to get lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines from VA from 9.5 million to more than 33 million,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Meeting the task of vaccinating this expanded population will be a tremendous undertaking for the VA, and will require a significant increase in our allocation of vaccine supply, but I am confident that VA's workforce is up to the task.”

VA is providing COVID-19 vaccinations to Veterans and employees per its [COVID-19 Vaccination Plan](#). As of March 24, VA has fully vaccinated 1,594,812 individuals, including Veterans, VA employees and federal partners.

The next steps in VA's prioritized expansion efforts are to offer the vaccine to all enrolled Veterans — approximately 9.5 million — followed by those outlined in the bill, as vaccine supply permits:

- Non-enrolled Veterans as defined in the new legislation, including those without service-connected disabilities and who have incomes above VA's threshold.
- Overseas Veterans who rely on the [Foreign Medical Program](#).
- Veteran caregivers who are enrolled in either the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers or the Program of General Caregiver Support Services.
- Veteran caregivers enrolled in certain Geriatrics and Extended Care Programs, such as Veteran Directed Care, Bowel and Bladder, Home Based Primary Care and VA's Medical Foster Home Program.
- [Civilian Health and Medical Programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs](#) recipients. Veteran spouses.

In March and April 2021, VA will conduct pilots of COVID-19 vaccination for individuals specified in HR1276 at select VA medical centers. These pilots will work through critical steps in the process including communications, operations including space and staffing, systems for registration, enrollment, and scheduling, documentation, and data transmission.

VA currently receives approximately 200,000 first, or single doses, of COVID-19 vaccine each week. VA estimates that it will need a minimum of 300,000 first or single doses of COVID-19 vaccine weekly to offer COVID-19 vaccination to an additional 3 million Veterans who are enrolled but not currently using VA health care. VA estimates that it will need approximately 600,000 first, or single doses, of COVID-19 vaccine each week to further expand vaccination to all individuals outlined in HR1276. First or single dose supply is the best indicator of VA's capacity to offer expanded COVID-19 vaccination.

Interested Veterans, their caregivers and Veteran spouses who qualify under the legislation can click [here](#) to get more information about COVID-19 vaccines at VA. Updates will be provided regarding the availability of vaccine supply and other resources.

Can I Take Off My Mask?

The CDC issues new guidelines for when you've been fully vaccinated

Have you been fully vaccinated, but aren't sure what to do next? If you've been vaccinated, you've reduced your risk of getting COVID-19. But there are still some safety precautions you should follow.

The CDC has new guidelines to help you understand what's safe to do now, and what hasn't changed.

What's changed?

If you've been fully vaccinated:

- You can gather indoors with fully vaccinated people without wearing a mask.
- You can visit friends and family from one other household who all live together without masks unless any of those people or anyone they live with has an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- If you're exposed to COVID-19, only get tested if you have symptoms.
- If you live in a group setting and are around someone who has COVID-19, you should still stay away from others for 14 days and get tested, even if you don't have symptoms.

What Hasn't Changed?

For now, if you've been fully vaccinated:

- You should still protect yourself and others by wearing a mask, staying 6 feet apart from others, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces.
- Take precautions whenever you're in public or spending time with anyone unvaccinated, especially if they're at an increased risk of severe illness.
- Avoid medium- or large-sized gatherings.
- Delay travel. If you do travel, you'll need to follow CDC requirements.
- Watch out for symptoms of COVID-19, especially if you've been around someone who's sick. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should get tested and stay home and away from others.

VA Extending Debt Relief for Veterans

VA is extending debt relief for Veterans through Sept. 30, 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. VA will suspend collection of all Veteran benefit overpayments incurred between April 6, 2020, and Sept. 30, 2021. No adverse actions or collection attempts will occur during this suspension period. Additionally, all copayments for medical care and pharmacy services incurred from April 6, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2021, will be cancelled, along with any fees or interest. Any payments for this time period will be refunded.

VA is committed to keeping Veterans informed about their debt and the expansive relief options available.

What will happen next

With regard to benefit overpayments, Veterans will receive a letter from the VA Debt Management Center (DMC) showing current debt amount as well as available options. Subsequent letters will be sent showing updates to Veterans' accounts.

What Veterans can do now

For benefit overpayments, no action is required through Sept. 30, 2021. That said, if Veterans would like to resolve debts sooner, there are options they can exercise now. VA can work with Veterans to determine what option is best. Options include:

- Making a payment
- Establishing a repayment plan
- Submitting a compromise offer
- Disputing the debt
- Requesting a waiver

For benefit debt, information is available online at <https://www.va.gov/manage-va-debt/>, or by calling the DMC at 800-827-0648, or via IRIS at <https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask/>.

Your VA health care continues

There will be no change in the quality and availability of VA health care during this time. You can schedule appointments and communicate with your providers in the same manner you have been.

If you are concerned about copayments you owe for health care and pharmacy provided prior to April 6, 2020, you can apply for a debt relief program. For more information on financial relief, Veterans can visit https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/revenue_ops/Financial_Hardship.asp or call the Health Resource Center at 866-400-1238, Monday through Friday from 8:00am-8:00pm ET.

Charges for medical care and prescriptions incurred from April 6, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2021, will be cancelled. VA will refund payments that Veterans have already made.

For [medical care copayment questions](https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/revenue_ops/Financial_Hardship.asp#Relief), please review the information found on the following website: https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/revenue_ops/Financial_Hardship.asp#Relief or call the Health Resource Center (866-400-1238).

VA will work with all Veterans who apply for debt relief to determine the best possible solution.

Contact information

- For questions about VA benefit debt, including information on how to make voluntary repayment arrangements, or for information about how to request a waiver, how to dispute a debt, or how to submit a compromise offer, call the DMC (800-827-0648) from 6:30am-6:00pm CT Monday through Friday. Visit <https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask/> to submit your request online.
- For medical care copayment questions, please contact the Health Resource Center at (866-400-1238) from 7:00am to 7:00pm CT Monday through Friday.
- If a Veteran's debt was referred to the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury), the debt is suspended through Sept. 30, 2021. For questions on debts referred to Treasury, contact the Treasury Cross-Servicing Program (888-826-3127) or the Treasury Offset Program (800-304-3107).

VA is here to help Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please follow national and local guidelines to stay healthy and safe.

**This post was updated 3/25/21 with additional medical care and pharmacy services information.*

Contact us to make arrangements for outstanding VA benefits debts

FOR HELP contact Debt Management Center,
Call or submit your request online

 **1-800-827-0648**

 **<https://iris.custhelp.va.gov>**

If you have questions about your VA benefits or the status of your claim

VA Regional Office

for other VA benefits

1-800-827-1000

Health Resource Center

for health care debts

1-866-400-1238

VA Education Call Center

for education benefits

1-888-442-4551



VA Suicide Prevention Tool Puts Lifesaving Information in R.E.A.C.H.

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a mobile app, March 18, that offers step-by-step guidance for those who are trying to support someone they care about and for those who are concerned about their own emotional wellbeing.

Developed by the PREVENTS Office, the [How We R.E.A.C.H. Coaching Tool](#) includes five actions to take when R.E.A.C.H.ing out to someone in need or when you are R.E.A.C.H.ing out for help for yourself. It provides additional resource information and suggested language to use when starting what are often very difficult conversations.

When we R.E.A.C.H. to those in need, we:

- R – Reach out and ask, “How are you ... really?” Listen and offer hope.
- E – Engage them about possible risk factors and changes in their life to better understand their pain.
- A – Attend to their safety. Unless you are concerned about your safety, stay with them.
- C – Connect them to resources such as supportive

friends and family, professionals or a crisis line.

- H – Help them make and maintain a plan to stay safe. Encourage them to share it with others.

When we R.E.A.C.H. because we are hurting, we:

- R – Reach to a loved one or someone we trust. Don't be afraid to reach out — now.
- E – Engage those we trust and discuss life changes and risk factors that are contributing to our pain.
- A – Attend to our safety. Contact someone who can be with us and help us stay safe.
- C – Connect with family, friends or appropriate professionals. Contact a crisis line and be honest so they can help.
- H – Help others understand how they can help us stay safe. Share a safety plan if we have one.

“The How We [R.E.A.C.H.](#) Coaching Tool empowers everyone with basic information so they can

take the necessary critical steps to provide — or receive — help and hope,” said PREVENTS Executive Director Barbara Van Dahlen, Ph.D. “It puts this important information at our fingertips, on our phones, giving people the confidence to reach out for themselves, to friends and loved ones, to ensure they get the support they deserve.”

The tool is a key component of [R.E.A.C.H.](#), the first ever national public health campaign focused on suicide prevention. Established in July 2020, [R.E.A.C.H.](#) aims to engage everyone with the goal of changing the culture of mental health and preventing suicide among Veterans and all Americans.

It was developed with the help of military and Veterans Service Organizations, and in collaboration with other organizations that have pledged to assist with the dissemination of this potentially lifesaving app. Download the [How We R.E.A.C.H. Coaching Tool](#).

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a

VA Allocates \$1B to Aid State Veteran Homes Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it will make grants totaling \$1 billion to [State Veterans Homes](#) operated across the country to ensure that residents continue to receive high quality care, live in modern, safe facilities, and are protected from the COVID-19 pandemic.

VA is appreciative to Congress for providing the funding for these grants in the [American Rescue Plan \(ARP\) Act of 2021](#) and the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act \(CARES\)](#) Act as amended by the [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021](#).

“Too many Veterans residing in State Veterans Homes

have suffered greatly during this challenging pandemic, and it's vital that we do everything within our power to help them through these tough times,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “We are working to ensure our Veterans are protected and that their state-run homes are well equipped for the challenges ahead.”

Source and allocation of funds:

- \$500 million from ARP designated to provide grants through the current capital grant program for construction of State Veterans homes.
- \$250 million from ARP designated for grants related

to operating needs based on each state's share of total Veteran residents in nursing home and domiciliary care.

- \$150 million from CARES Act designated for grants for capital needs for construction funds to modify buildings to prepare, prevent or respond in order to mitigate the risk of COVID-19.
- \$100 million designated by the [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021](#), for grants for emergency payments to existing State Veterans Homes to prevent, prepare and respond to COVID-19.

Learn more about [State Veterans Homes](#).

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 | 888-878-6880
www.durham.va.gov

Fayetteville VAMC

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

Clayton CBOC

11618 US Hwy 70 Business Highway West,
Suites 100 & 200
Clayton, NC 27520

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 27809
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

2580 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

2270 College Avenue, Suite 145
Forest City, NC 28043-2459
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 Ellstree Lane
Raleigh, NC 27617
(919) 361-6419

Roanoke Vet Center

1401 Franklin Rd 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 or call 919-956-5541

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