

VA PITTSBURGH HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

VETERANS CONNECT

{ ISSUE 9 | 2020 }



Secretary Wilkie Visits VA Pittsburgh

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System



Front cover: VA Secretary Robert Wilkie (center) tours VAPHS' H.J. Heinz III campus with VAPHS Director Don Koenig (right), Chief of Staff Dr. Ali Sonel (left) and other VA staff.

Dear Veterans,

A year into my appointment as director, I am pleased to report VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) is strong and committed to evolving to meet your needs.

We are strong because you trust us with your health care: You gave us an overall trust score of 92.5% for fiscal year 2019. Thank you for consistently choosing us for the great care, outcomes, convenience and respect we provide.

To build even greater trust, we are evolving to serve you efficiently and closer to where you live through telemedicine, traveling care teams and innovative partnerships with other VISN 4 providers and our five outpatient clinics. We have also embraced whole health, which puts you at the center of decisions to reach your wellness goals and manage chronic conditions.

Outside of VA, I am honored to serve on a Pennsylvania Senate task force advisory committee that is identifying ways to improve coordination of federal, state, local and nonprofit Veterans services across the commonwealth. The task force is to report its recommendations to the Senate by October.

Sincerely,

Donald E. Koenig
Director, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Quick Tips to Prevent Spreading Infection



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.



Stay at least **six feet** away from others when possible.



Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.



Use an **alcohol-based hand sanitizer** that contains at least 60% alcohol.



Stay home if you are sick or becoming sick.

VA Health Care and OTH Discharges



Veterans with other than honorable (OTH) discharges may still be eligible for certain benefits, including VA health care.

Former service members with an OTH administrative discharge may receive care for mental health emergencies for an initial period of up to 90 days, which can include inpatient, residential or outpatient care.

During the 90-day period, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) will work together to determine if the mental health condition is a result of a service-related injury. If the condition is found to be service

connected, the service member will be eligible for ongoing coverage for that condition.

Following implementation of Public Law 115-141, VA also notified 475,000 Veterans with OTH discharges they may be eligible for mental or behavioral health care. Eligible Veterans include those who were on active duty for more than 100 days and served in a combat role, or experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault while serving.

Additionally, VA may be able to treat a mental illness presumed to be related to military service. When VA is unable to provide care, VA will work with partner agencies and will assist in making referrals for additional care as needed.

 If you know a Veteran with an OTH who might be eligible for services, ask them to call or visit a VA medical facility near them. The number to call for VA Pittsburgh is **Patient Registration at 412-360-6993 or 412-822-2040.**



Veterans in crisis should call the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 and press 1, text 838255 or chat online at www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat.

Connect to Your Care

24/7 Nurse Call Center:

412-822-2222, press 3

Audiology: Hearing, tinnitus and balance disorders. 412-360-6400

Behavioral Health: 412-360-6600

Caregiver Services: Help at home and someone to listen.

412-822-2364 or 1-855-260-3274

Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders:

Residential: 412-360-6611

Outpatient: 412-360-6092

Chaplain Services: 412-822-1551

Community Based Care: Services to help chronically ill or disabled Veterans of any age remain in their homes. 412-822-2910

Connected Care: Telehealth, VA Mobile and more. 412-360-3235

Copays: Online at pay.gov, by phone at 1-888-827-4817, or in person at any VA medical center.

Dental: 412-822-2130

Emergency Department: 24-hour emergency physical and mental health care services. 412-360-6322

Eye Clinic: 412-360-6700

Environmental Registries:

412-822-1707

Homeless Veterans: Transitional and permanent housing, case management, dental and medical care. 412-822-1272

Help for Homeless Veterans

hotline: 877-4AID-VET (424-3838)

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and

Transgender Veterans: Culturally and clinically competent care for LGBT Veterans. 412-360-1210

Military Sexual Trauma Support:

412-360-1040

My HealtheVet: Online access to health records, electronic messaging and prescription refills. www.myhealth.va.gov
412-360-6838

Pathology and Laboratory:

412-360-1572

Patient Advocate: 412-360-3614

Pharmacy: Refill prescriptions by phone, mail or the internet.
412-822-3140

Physical Medicine and

Rehabilitation: Inpatient and outpatient physical, occupational, and kinesiotherapy, low vision and blind rehab services. 412-822-2111

Podiatry: 412-822-3000, press 5

Primary Care: Annual checkups, nutrition counseling and more.
412-822-3000

Prosthetics: 412-822-3728

Radiology: X-ray, ultrasound, CT, and MRI. 412-360-6216

Release of Information:

412-822-1135 or ROIPGH@va.gov

Research: 412-360-2386

Speech Pathology: Treatments for speech, language, voice, cognitive communication, swallowing impairments and training for stroke patients. 412-360-6400

Spinal Cord Injury: 412-822-3000

Surgical Services: Same-day surgery, neurosurgery and cardiothoracic, hand, ophthalmology, orthopedic, otolaryngology, plastic, transplant and vascular surgery. 412-360-6700

Transition and Care

Management Program: Health care tailored to post-9/11 Veterans. 412-822-2362

Travel Office: 412-360-3620 or 412-360-6783

Vet Centers: Counseling and referral for combat Veterans, their families, and any Veteran who was sexually traumatized while serving.
Pittsburgh: 412-920-1765
Wheeling: 304-232-0587
White Oak: 412-678-7704

Veterans Crisis Line: Confidential help for Veterans in crisis and their families and friends.

www.veteranscrisisline.net

1-800-273-8255 (press 1)

Text to 838255

Voluntary and Recreation

Services: 412-822-3098

Women's Health Services:

412-360-6289

IF YOU ARE HAVING A MEDICAL EMERGENCY:

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

If it is not a VA facility:

- Request transfer to a VA facility when medically stable.
- Report the non-VA visit to your primary care VA facility **within 72 hours or upon discharge.**

Not all Veterans are eligible for every service listed.

For a more comprehensive list of services, visit www.pittsburgh.va.gov/services





VAPHS Director Don Koenig (left) gives VISN 4 Network Director Timothy W. Leizert and VA Secretary Robert Wilkie a tour of the University Drive campus.

Above and Beyond

VA Secretary Wilkie Coins VAPHS' Best

During a visit to VAPHS in 2019, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie presented challenge coins to 11 employees and a volunteer who provide outstanding service to Veterans.

The presentations are a nod to the longstanding military tradition in which challenge coins signify membership in a particular unit or recognition for a job well done. The challenge is not to be caught without your coin when another service member calls for a coin check.

Wilkie presented the coins to VAPHS staff and a volunteer who have made lasting contributions to VA health care. Our challenge to you – take a moment to read about each of our coin recipients and next time you see one of them, challenge them to a friendly coin check.



University Drive Recipients



Catherine Abee

Cath lab technician who invented a heated pulse-oximetry probe to greatly improve blood-oxygen readings. VAPHS, the University of Pittsburgh and Human Engineering Research Laboratories engineered a patented prototype that is pending commercial development.



Vida Passero, MD

Hematology oncologist who designed and implemented a tele-oncology program to care for chemotherapy patients in Altoona, saving Veterans the four-hour roundtrip to Pittsburgh.



Anu Thomas

Bed Management Center nurse manager who implemented policies that increased staff satisfaction and significantly reduced Veterans' Emergency Department bed wait times.



Seshaiyengar Venkatesh, MD

Ophthalmologist who voluntarily traveled to Erie numerous times over an 18-month period without financial incentive to provide patients with close-to-home cataract surgery.



Pamela Lowery

Medical support assistant who always listens closely to Veterans' concerns and takes extra steps to meet Veterans' needs, even once helping clean a patient who had soiled himself to restore the Veteran's sense of dignity.



Igor Tseyko, MD

Psychiatrist who each day provides professional, compassionate and personalized care, often going above and beyond the call of duty to serve Veterans. At least one Veteran credits his recovery through the Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders directly to Tseyko.

H.J. Heinz III Recipients



Clarence (Code) Gomberg
97-year-old World War II Veteran with 70 years' service volunteering at VAPHS. He was present during the 1950 groundbreaking for the Highland Drive campus. Now, he continues to give back to Veterans in need at our H.J. Heinz III campus.



Mary Frances Pilarski
Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program coordinator whose work developing community partnerships to address housing, employment, addiction treatment, job training, etc., for homeless Veterans played a significant role in state and local government declaring an effective end to Veteran homelessness across western Pennsylvania.



Kevin Merritt
Supervisory environmental engineer who leads VAPHS' water safety team in monitoring and maintaining water quality and safety. Municipalities, civilian hospitals and VA facilities nationwide seek Merritt's expertise to ensure safe water across the country.



Lindsey Herlinger
Transplant coordinator whose work with VAPHS' liver and kidney transplant team has made VAPHS a worldwide destination for Veteran transplant surgery and the largest transplant program in the Veterans Health Administration.



Nicholas Haller
Exemplary leader and former interim chief nurse executive who helped generate pride in VAPHS nursing and shaped a can-do culture among all service lines. A licensed skilled nursing administrator, Haller stepped up following a leadership retirement to serve VA Pittsburgh extraordinarily through challenging times.



Vincent Scalamogna
Chief logistics officer who leads VAPHS' supply chain staff with honor and distinction. He worked with VA agencies to secure alternative sources of supply when VAPHS' prime vendor began to fail in 2019, ensuring uncompromised patient care and averting transfers of Veteran patients to non-VA facilities.



Why I Choose VA

Nelline Talton

Branch: Air Force

Years of Service: 8

Hometown: Pittsburgh

Why do you choose VA care?

VA is on the forefront of staying current in today's world by providing a full range of medical services. VAPHS has tailored my health care plan by designating a personalized team of physicians to meet my specific health care needs. Their reputation for providing quality care is phenomenal. This team of medical specialists and nurses has diligently made every effort to consistently provide me with excellent care. They may be employees on your team, but they are heroes to me.

Women's Health Care at VAPHS

Our health care specialists provide women Veterans with mammograms and evaluation and treatment for abnormal Pap tests, abnormal uterine bleeding, infertility, pelvic pain and gynecologic cancers. We also offer reproductive health care services, including contraception and maternity care. Most services are provided on-site at our University Drive and H.J. Heinz III campuses or five outpatient clinics in the community.

 To learn more about women's health care at VA Pittsburgh, contact Val Posa, women Veterans program manager, at **412-360-6289**.

Why would you recommend VAPHS to other women Veterans?

I recommend VAPHS to women Veterans for a number of reasons. The check-in process is easy, and from there, they provide a warm, welcoming and cozy atmosphere while you wait. The women's center is staffed with compassionate, resourceful, and diverse nurses, physicians and support personnel. VAPHS takes pride in its research program and in providing the best quality mental, physical and emotional health care to meet the needs of women Veterans.



VETERAN
BENEFITS

PENNSYLVANIA OFFERS VETERANS BENEFITS

Are you a Pennsylvania resident who needs help obtaining military records or financial assistance? The Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) can help you with programs that include:

- Veterans Temporary Assistance/Military Family Relief Assistance programs
- Records Request Program
- Amputee, Paralyzed and Blind Veterans Pension programs
- Educational Gratuities Program
- Disabled Veteran Real Estate Tax Exemption Program

For more information on DMVA's programs, visit www.dmva.pa.gov/veteransaffairs.

PA VETERANS REGISTRY

Want the latest on state benefits and programs for PA Veterans?

Sign up for the Veterans Registry at www.register.dmva.pa.gov. The registry is open to Veterans, their families and all who work with Veterans.

Battlefield Acupuncture

Veterans in long-term care benefit from a specialized form of acupuncture developed for wartime use



Acupuncturist Amanda Federovich places the first of two needles in one of Veteran Nadine Stanford's ears.

Acupuncture is the practice of inserting fine needles at specific points in the body to relieve pain or cure disease. Battlefield acupuncture (BFA) confines the practice to the ears to allow its use on the battlefield, where the entire body is not accessible. It uses an evidence-based protocol where tiny needles are placed on the skin of the outer ear to reduce pain throughout the entire body.

As a certified registered nurse practitioner, Federovich is VISN 4's first advanced practice provider to obtain BFA certification. She is the first clinician to provide BFA in VAPHS' Community Living Center.

Along with standard acupuncture treatments, BFA is a key component of whole health. Whole health goes beyond disabilities, injuries and

illnesses: It focuses on each person's values, aspirations and goals for health and well-being.

"It's really a great component of whole health," said Federovich. "We're empowering our Veterans to be active participants in their health care."

For Veterans with chronic pain, anxiety and PTSD, BFA can lessen the need for pain medications.

BFA helps some Veterans more than others. On a scale from 0-10, the average response is a 2.2-point

“We’re empowering our Veterans to be active participants in their health care.”

reduction in pain, Federovich said.

"Some Veterans have a more significant pain reduction response than others," said Federovich. "Having total pain relief is the best-case scenario."

Federovich is training other VA Pittsburgh providers in battlefield acupuncture so more Veterans can benefit.

▶ If you think battlefield acupuncture might benefit you, **talk to your VA provider.**

DID YOU KNOW?

We provide a weekly women's-only battlefield acupuncture clinic at University Drive. Ask your provider for details. You cannot participate if you are pregnant or prone to keloids.

Access VA Care From Home

You can stay home and still receive health care from the VA Pittsburgh providers you know and trust. All you need to connect safely with your VA providers is a phone or any device with an internet connection. Online or on-the-go, we have you covered.



Secure Messaging

With My HealtheVet, VA's online patient portal, you can send online secure messages to your VA health care team to ask them nonurgent health questions. Register at myhealth.va.gov.



Prescription Refills

You can request prescription refills and order and ship medications to your home using My HealtheVet or the Rx Refill mobile app. Download the app at mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill.



Video or Telephone Appointments

Rather than going to a VA facility, you can receive care at home with a video or phone appointment. To set up a VA Video Connect or phone appointment, send your provider a secure message on My HealtheVet at myhealth.va.gov. To learn more about VA Video Connect, visit mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect.



Home Telehealth

Telehealth technologies can collect and send your health data, including vital signs, to your care team. Providers get the information they need to manage your care, while you are in a more comfortable environment. Learn more about home telehealth at telehealth.va.gov/type/home.



Tele Urgent Care

Did you know you can use the camera on your smart phone, computer or tablet to see your health care team from anywhere? Tele Urgent Care lets you meet your provider privately and securely in a virtual medical room.

Tele Urgent Care treats many common conditions including:

- minor cuts, skin irritations, ulcers, nail disorders
- insect and spider bites
- cold and flu symptoms, bronchitis, sore throat
- headaches
- sprains, back and joint pain
- eye complaints
- urinary tract infections
- upset stomach, constipation
- elevated blood pressure or blood sugars

When you call, a nurse reviews your symptoms and provides a care recommendation. If appropriate, the nurse will schedule a Tele Urgent Care appointment.



866-482-7488, press 3
Weekdays, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

VetQ&A

Answering Your Important Questions

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Q. If I am eligible, why should I register for a VA health registry?

A. Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange, burn pits or other environmental hazards during their military service can document their concerns through one or more of VA's six health registries. The registries help VA identify and respond more quickly to potential long-term health effects. The six registries are Agent Orange, Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit, Depleted Uranium (DU), Gulf War, Ionizing Radiation, and Toxic Embedded Fragments.

Eligible Veterans include, but are not limited to, those who served in Vietnam, the Gulf War and conflicts from the 2000s to the present. No-cost medical exams are mandatory with all but the Open Burn Pit registry. For more information or to schedule an exam, call **VA Pittsburgh's Environmental Health Clinic at 412-822-1707**. Details regarding each registry and eligibility are also available at www.publichealth.va.gov.

Q. How can I have a prescription that was written by a non-VA provider for urgent care filled in a timely manner?

A. If the prescription was for urgent care and is for a 14-day or less supply (no refills and only seven days for opioids), you can fill it at an in-network pharmacy, at VA, or at a non-network pharmacy. If you use a non-network pharmacy, you must pay for the prescription and then file a claim for reimbursement with your VA medical facility. **To file a claim**, mail a copy of the prescription and receipt to your VA's community care office (for VA Pittsburgh: VAPHS Community Care Clinic, 1010 Delafield Rd., Pittsburgh, PA 15215).

Please note: You must submit all prescriptions for a 14-day supply or greater, or for non-urgent, routine medications, to VA for processing and fulfillment. Learn more at www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/Urgent_Care.asp.

Q. How can I help other Veterans enroll in VA health care?

A. You can help other Veterans find out if they are eligible for VA health care by asking them to: **1. Apply online** at va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply; **2. Call VA toll-free** at 877-222-8387 on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. for application help; **3. Download and mail VA Form 10-10EZ** at www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/10-10EZ-fillable.pdf. For assistance, Veterans can call our enrollment coordinator at 412-360-6993.

Veterans Connect delivers news and information of interest to area Veterans.

Please send suggestions, comments and requests to VAPHSEditor@va.gov.



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

University Drive | Pittsburgh, PA 15240

www.pittsburgh.va.gov

412-822-2222 | 866-482-7488

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COVID-19 TESTING FOR VETERANS

Veterans with a **sore throat, dry cough, shortness of breath or fever** should call **412-360-6000** and **select option #3** to speak to a nurse before visiting our facilities or to schedule an appointment for drive-through testing at University Drive. Do not report to the Emergency Department for testing. Do not report for testing without an appointment.

Don't Miss a Thing!



SAVE THE DATES

VA health care
informational events

VETERANS TOWN HALLS

Visit www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/events for information and details. Like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter to stay up-to-date.



Talk to a Nurse Anytime

NURSE TRIAGE CALL CENTER
412-822-2222
1-866-482-7488 (toll free)

Call our Nurse Triage Call Center anytime and **press 3** to talk with a registered nurse for advice on medical or mental health concerns.

Calls connect to a centralized nurse triage call center in Butler on weekdays. Calls placed after hours, on weekends and holidays connect with a nurse call center in New York.



VETERANS HEALTH LIBRARY

The Veterans Health Library has moved: veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov

Update your web browsers and bookmarks to keep this reliable source of Veteran's health content, medication information and health videos quickly available.