

New England **VETERAN**

A publication of the VA New England Healthcare System

OUTREACH
The new "SITREP"

WELLNESS
Healthy Takeout

HERITAGE
USS Massachusetts

CAREGIVING
Program expands

New England **Veteran**

FIND YOUR VA

Fold-out map with
85 VA locations

SOMEONE LIKE YOU

Tips from a Veteran
outreach specialist

GET THE 411

5 things every
new Veteran should know

STAYING MOBILE

Meet Army Veteran & VA
Outreach Specialist Craig Hall

Fall / Special Edition 2020

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA New England Healthcare System



New England Veteran

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Message from the Network Director

Dear Veterans,

The pandemic has become a unique time for us at home and at VA. Veterans are at the center of every decision we face as we confront the greatest health care crisis in our lifetimes.

Our job at VA New England is to unite Veterans and provide the highest level of care and support, whether at home or at one of our sites of care located across our six states and eight major integrated healthcare systems.

Therefore, this special fall edition of New England Veteran is designed to educate you about VA, on topics such as health care, benefits, programs and services. Inside is a special guide with a fold-out map that lists all our sites of care, regional benefit offices and Vet Centers.

Our cover feature profiles Vet Center Outreach Specialist Craig Hall, an Army and Iraq combat Veteran. Since being critically injured while on mission, Craig has relied on VA health care to help him keep moving. Veterans, like Craig, are supported every day by people like our VA New England Veteran peer specialists, who have found creative ways to stay connected with Veterans during the pandemic.

As needs continue to arise, VA New England has brought on many new employees these past several months, many with military service, and we are still hiring. If you know someone who wants to work at VA, visit vacareers.va.gov.

I am privileged to be part of such a great VA New England team, and I am inspired every day by their efforts and energy in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With thanks for your service,

Ryan Lilly, MPA
Network Director

The Battleship USS Massachusetts (BB-59)



Massachusetts off the coast of Point Wilson, Washington, c. July 1944. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Navy.

By Mike McNamara,
Outreach program manager

On September 22, 1941, the USS Massachusetts, a South Dakota-class fast battleship, was launched at the Bethlehem Ship Works in Pennsylvania.

She was the third in her class to join the U.S. Navy. She was 680 feet long and displaced over 45,000 tons fully loaded. Her nine 16" guns could hit targets up to 22 miles away.

Following commissioning and training, she was sent to French North Africa in November 1942 to support the Allied landings. While there, she dueled with the French Battleship Jean Bart and neutralized her. USS Massachusetts was the only American battleship to engage an enemy battleship in the Atlantic theater of operations during World War II.

At the conclusion of the North Africa landings, Massachusetts transferred to the Pacific for operations against Japan. She primarily served as an escort for the fast carrier task forces, protecting the aircraft carriers from surface and air attacks. She took part in most of the major campaigns from 1943 through 1945, including bombarding industrial targets in the Japanese Home Islands.

After the war, Massachusetts returned to the United States and was decommissioned and assigned to the Atlantic Reserve Fleet in 1947. In 1962, she was decommissioned and in 1965 she was transferred to the Massachusetts Memorial Committee and preserved as a museum ship at Battleship Cove in Fall River, Mass.

In 2015, the Department of the Navy announced that USS Massachusetts (SSN-798), a Virginia-class submarine, will be the seventh U.S. Navy vessel named for the state of Massachusetts. The ship is expected to be completed as early as 2022.

Battleship Cove is a non-profit maritime museum and war memorial, featuring the world's largest collection of World War II naval vessels. It is open to the public.

Iraq Veteran with Prosthetic Leg Keeps Trucking

Army Veteran Craig Hall has a prosthetic leg and as an outreach specialist drives the “big rig” — a 35-foot Mobile Vet Center on wheels. Despite his injury, he is determined to let nothing slow him down. Based out of the Hartford Vet Center in Connecticut, Hall takes the vehicle all over New England to connect with Veterans about VA programs and services and offer readjustment advice. In the past four years, he estimates he has helped about 1,000 Veterans connect with VA benefits and programs. He says he has the best job in VA and a great story to share.



Prosthetist Tom Mesick examines Craig Hall during a VA telehealth appointment with a VA Amputee System of Care Team. Photo by John Paradis



Veteran Craig Hall poses while stationed in Samarra, Iraq.

Motivated to serve after 9/11, the Wales, Mass., native enlisted in 2005. He was a 19K M1 Abrams Tank Crew member with the 1st Cavalry Division in Samarra, Iraq.

While on a mission on April 27, 2007, an improvised explosive device blew up under the tank he was riding inside. After multiple surgeries, he lost his leg below the knee.

Ever since he was a child, Hall has had a passion for motorcycles and motocross. With the help of VA health care and the best prosthetic technology out there, he still rides competitively today and works closely with other Veterans to help them get back to the things they love doing too.

Earlier this year, Hall spoke with Paul Corbett for a New England Veteran videocast. Here's part of their conversation.

Corbett: You have a different kind of anniversary. Can you tell us about what "Alive Day" is?

Hall: Alive Day is the day where you feel like you should have died. I'm just happy to be alive.

Corbett: So you transitioned back. Do you remember the first time you caught someone staring at your leg? Were you angry or did you make a joke about it?

Hall: At first, it was kind of embarrassing. Going to the store, it was like one of those things where you knew you were different. I don't think I ever came to terms with it until I started working for the Vet Center. You start realizing your job relies on you talking to and getting to know people — your brothers and sisters — and getting them in for services within VA and within the Vet Center. It was then that I realized this thing (pointing to his prosthetic) is an asset. It draws people in. So now someone says, "I see you're missing a leg." And I say, "Yeah, and I see you served." It helps me because it's them starting the conversation.

Corbett: Tell me more about your job at the Vet Center.

Hall: What I love most is working alongside other VA folks and just collaborating and hooking up Veterans with all the services.



Veteran Craig Hall talking with Vet Center staff outside the Mobile Vet Center.

Corbett: And the Vet Centers help family members, too.

Hall: It's all about helping the family through the process too because when you go home (from military service) and you're having all these issues — you may be isolating yourself or you may be showing all the signs of PTSD — it doesn't just affect you, it affects your family as well.

Corbett: What advice do you have for Veterans and their families as they readjust?

Hall: If you feel something is wrong, something probably is wrong. Seek help. The stigma of mental health is strong. It's the military in us — I have a job to do, a mission to do and you just drive on — that's what you're taught. You have to drop that (mentality) when you get home. Don't let it linger. I'm thankful for Vet Centers and for the VA.



Scan the QR code or visit youtu.be/-uS0sD21Bn0 for our videocast with Craig.

Get Support through New England's Vet Centers

Vet Centers provide community-based counseling, outreach and referral services to eligible Veterans and their families. The 21 Vet Centers and two Vet Center outstations in New England help those who served in any combat zone or area of hostility, experienced military sexual trauma, or served as part of a mortuary affairs or drone crew.

Services include counseling for transitioning and readjustment, military sexual trauma and any issues related to marriage, family and bereavement.

Vet Center staff are knowledgeable about health care and programs offered at your local VA medical center and can seek referrals to VA mental health care, employment, education and other services and benefits within the broader VA system.

Moreover, Vet Centers have multiple access points throughout New England, to include locations at local churches, YMCAs and schools. Mobile Vet Centers provide services in rural areas.

You can reach the national Vet Center Call Center at 1-877-WAR-VETS (927-8387) or call your nearest Vet Center. See the fold-out map in this special edition guide to VA services in the New England area.

CAREGIVER PARTNERS:

Understanding & Healing the Wounds of PTSD



Veterans are not the only people that suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD can occur if you have experienced any sort of trauma. Are you a caregiver for a Veteran with a history of trauma? Are you a caregiver that suffers from PTSD? VA will help you understand PTSD and show how you can get help. Healing can occur no matter how these wounds developed.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel for those who do struggle with PTSD. If you are a caregiver of a Veteran enrolled in the VA, you can register for VA caregiver telephone groups each month. To register, call 1-855-260-3274.

VA Caregiver Benefit Expands



VA New England recognizes the important role of family caregivers in supporting the health and wellness of Veterans. Therefore, VA New England actively supports the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, or PCAFC. The program provides to the caregiver a monthly stipend, or payment, access to health care benefits through the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the VA (CHAMPVA), at least 30 days per year of respite care and education and training.

Effective October 1, 2020, the program will include those Veterans who served during World War II and the Korean and Vietnam War eras, as well as any Veteran who served after May 7, 1975.

Under the final regulation, PCAFC will include Veterans that have a single or a combined service-connected disability rating by VA of 70 percent or higher, regardless of whether it resulted from an injury, illness or disease.

To qualify as a caregiver, you must be at least 18 years old and be the spouse, son, daughter, parent, step-family member, or extended family member of the Veteran. Or, you must be someone who lives full-time with the Veteran or is willing to do so if designated as a family caregiver. Visit **www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/comprehensive-assistance-for-family-caregivers** to access more details, view additional requirements, and learn how to apply.

In New England, our dedicated Caregiver Support Program provides support and offers important resources and services. Your local Caregiver Support Coordinator (CSC) at your VA New England medical center can help. Call the Caregiver Support Line (CSL) at 1-855-260-3274 to speak to a caring, licensed professional. Call between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

VA Video Connect Takes Off

Because VA New England already had a robust telehealth infrastructure in place, the health care system was able to ramp up its telehealth capabilities to meet increased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, video telehealth appointments to Veterans' homes throughout New England has increased more than 1,800 percent this year as Veterans increasingly choose virtual care through VA Video Connect.

VA Video Connect allows Veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA care teams on any computer, tablet or mobile device with an internet connection. As in-person interactions decreased, VA Video Connect allowed Veterans to continue care and remain safely at home. Peak usage here in New England has resulted in more than 1,557 appointments per day.

Veterans have commented in post-appointment surveys they are satisfied to have their health care needs met virtually with no interruption to their care. Most report they have not had trouble adjusting to the new technology.



Dr. Jeffrey Kravetz, a primary care physician at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System, types in a note while speaking with a Veteran during a VA Video Connect telehealth appointment.

"A major component of this network has been VA Video Connect," says Lisa Eisele, a registered nurse and the VA New England Healthcare System Connected Care Program director. "We've surpassed — nearly doubled — the national response. So, we are very proud of how many Veterans have been using this critical telehealth option to connect with our health care teams." VA New England's telehealth encounters, overall, have nearly quadrupled in the past six months over the same period in 2019.

At the national level, VA is working with strategic partners through the VA Secretary's Center of Strategic Partnerships to increase access for Veterans to the technology required to participate in VA telehealth services.

For information about VA's telehealth services, visit **www.connectedcare.va.gov**.

For a complete list of telehealth coordinators in the VA New England Healthcare System, visit **www.newengland.va.gov/patients/MHVCordinators.asp**.



Scan the QR code or visit **youtu.be/_VxIA0n_C_A** to access VA Video Connect instructions.

Start Walking for Better Health

By Diane Tinti-Wald,
Lead acute care physical therapist
VA Connecticut Healthcare System



Army Veteran Cheryl Amendola, a physical therapist for VA Connecticut, takes a walk on the VA West Haven campus. Photo by Jhunathyn Ellis, VA Connecticut

Despite COVID-19 and social distancing protocols, we can still stay healthy by committing to a daily walking program.

Harvard University research shows that following a healthy lifestyle may prevent 80 percent of coronary artery disease, 50 percent of strokes, 90 percent of Type II diabetes and 50 percent of arthritis cases.

Walking outdoors has many benefits too. It boosts vitamin D levels with five to 15 minutes of sunshine, lessens anxiety as sunlight increases serotonin levels, improves immunity, assists in weight loss and improves sleep.

The American College of Sports Medicine recommends gradually building up to 30 minutes of walking, five to six days per week.

Choosing Healthy Takeout



By Robin LaCroix,
Registered Dietitian
VA White River Junction Healthcare System

During COVID-19, some of us are choosing takeout or delivery from a local restaurant more often. Choose options that are enjoyable, balanced and nourishing to feel your best.

Here are some tips to help you make enjoyable take-out choices that also support your health.

- Pay attention to the way items are cooked and served. Choose baked, grilled, stir-fried, or roasted options over fried. If you want a fried entrée, choose a healthier side, such as a salad.
- Ask for sauces or dressings on the side so you can control how much you add.
- Be mindful of portions. Takeout options are often enough for two servings, so save half for the next day.

- Consider ordering a side vegetable, salad or cut up some fresh veggies at home to add to what you order. Many places will swap fries or chips for a salad.
- Sit down while you eat and pay attention to the flavors of your food. By slowing down, your brain has a chance to catch up to your stomach and let you know when you are full and satisfied.

For more information and recipes, visit www.nutrition.va.gov/Recipes.asp.



Scan the QR code or visit youtu.be/CCYxKE5uGCA for recipe videos and meal inspiration.

Around NEW ENGLAND

To read about each of these headline stories, visit the VA New England “News” page at www.newengland.va.gov/news

PORTLAND, MAINE

VA officials marked the groundbreaking for a new Portland Community-Based Outpatient Clinic at 141 West Commercial St. This allows VA Maine to expand services to Veterans in a 62,500-square-foot, state-of-the-art, energy-efficient facility.

WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VT.

A study by researchers at the White River Junction VA Medical Center and the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in New Hampshire shows that VA hospitals outperform or match nearby non-VA hospitals in surgical quality and patient safety.

MANCHESTER, N.H.

VA secured scarce personal protective equipment, or PPE, via FedEx flights through a first-of-its-kind partnership with the state of New Hampshire and inventor Dean Kamen. The flights delivered masks, gowns, test swabs and gloves.

NORTHAMPTON, MASS.

Thanks to Tim Moran, a Navy Veteran and VA Registered Nurse, Veterans received hundreds of letters from community members at the community living center (CLC) at the VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System.

PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Rhode Island native Lawrence Connell joins Providence VA as the new director of the healthcare system. A top priority, he says, will be hiring the “best and brightest” to care for Veterans.

BEDFORD, MASS.

Sreeman Lakshmanan, a sophomore from Chelmsford High School, organized care packages with food and other goodies and delivered them to the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital to aid those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

NEW HAVEN, CONN.

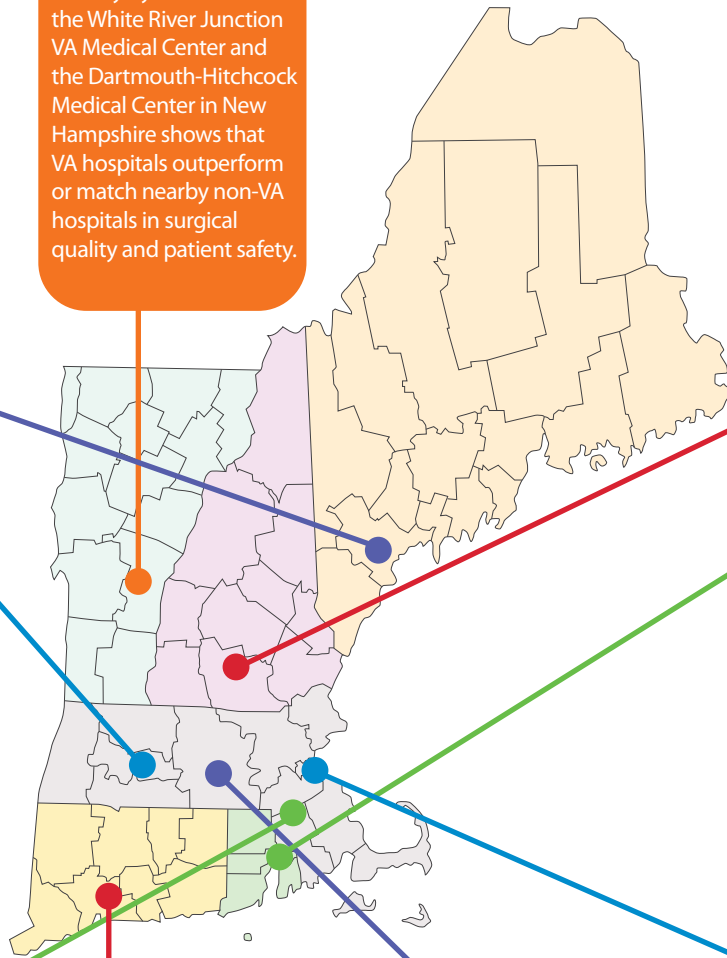
Yale University awarded VA Connecticut doctor Theddeus Iheanaco for leading the “Happiness Project,” to help increase access to primary care, clinical support and other evidence-based treatments in Nigeria.

WORCESTER, MASS.

Major construction has begun for a new five-story medical building on the University of Massachusetts Medical Center campus to house the VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System’s Community-Based Outpatient Clinic.

BOSTON, MASS.

The new Women’s Health Center at the Jamaica Plain Campus in the VA Boston Healthcare System has opened. Women Veterans are the VA’s largest growing patient population and VA Boston has a comprehensive team dedicated to their care.



Peer Specialists Connect over Virtual Coffee



Veteran VA peer specialists, Karen Milliken, left, a Navy Gulf War Veteran, and Jessica Mack, an Air Force Veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom, connect with Veterans over a virtual coffee. Photo by Charlotte Doherty, Veteran peer support specialist and Air Force Veteran



Navy Veteran Richard Cote enjoys his virtual coffee chats with Veteran peer support specialists.

Richard Cote, a Navy Vietnam-era Veteran, calls in for virtual coffee every day from his home in Lowell, Mass. Joining him are other Veterans from the region and some Veteran peer specialists from the nearby Bedford VA Medical Center.

"It's the highlight of my day," says Cote, who fixed jet engines when he served stateside in the Navy during the Vietnam War. Cote used to attend in-person coffee meet-ups with other Veterans before the pandemic. "Now there's no other way to get together in person, so these virtual coffees work out just fine."

For many Veterans, VA peer specialists are their main source of daily human interaction. Calls can sometimes last an hour and a half — providing a much-needed daily ritual for Veterans to check in with one another.

The sessions have given Veterans a simple and convenient way to socialize and continue relationships that otherwise would have been difficult without the video coffee chats.

The coffees, conducted over video conferencing, also provide an opportunity for Veterans to discuss what's on their mind during the pandemic and give them a chance to share information and ideas. More importantly, Cote says it is an excellent way to help reduce everyone's anxiety and stress, including that of the peer specialists, who share many of the same day-to-day life struggles.

Keeping Veterans Connected Socially

"Our team gets just as much out of the coffees as the Veterans calling in," says Anthony Russo, a Navy Veteran who supervises a team of VA Veteran peer specialists. "The role of a peer specialist is more important now with COVID because we can provide empathy and understanding based on our shared experiences. We are using our life experiences, whether it be with mental illness or with a substance use disorder, to help and mentor others going through similar struggles."

Cote credits two Veteran VA peer specialists, Karen Milliken, a Navy Gulf War Veteran, and Jessica Mack, an Air Force Veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom, for keeping the calls both informative and lighthearted.

"They really keep it a lot of fun — they make you want to call in every day," says Cote.

While the coffees have been a way to inject a sense of normalcy during a time when many Veterans are juggling family and work obligations and dealing with the challenges of a pandemic, they can also make a lasting impact.

During a recent call, Cote says important information was shared about a monthly free VA produce market where Veterans can drive up and get free fresh vegetables and other food items.



Jhunathyn Ellis, a Navy Veteran, checks in with a member of the VA Connecticut Healthcare System team using a smartphone.

The virtual coffees have been part of an overall strategic effort by VA New England to ensure the VA keeps a personal connection, whether by phone, video call, or by driving to a Veteran's location, when necessary.

Since peer support specialists already have strong community ties, they were able to quickly transition to a virtual platform and provide social support, help with food insecurity, and increase access to VA and community services, says Jay Gorman, a psychologist with VA New England's Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the pervasiveness of loneliness that was already prevalent in the Veteran community before COVID-19, emphasizing the importance of social connections, says Gorman, who is also an assistant professor of psychiatry at the Boston University School of Medicine.

"COVID-19 has underscored the necessity of strengthening community partnerships," says Gorman. "I'm inspired by the work of my colleagues and the Veteran community here in New England, and I'm also proud of the platform we've created to not just support Veterans but enable Veterans to support one another."

Gorman says the peer specialist program continues to work on a regional level with other VA medical centers in the VA New England Healthcare System and at the national level to identify additional ways to increase social connection through community partnerships during this global pandemic crisis.

To read more about this story, visit www.newengland.va.gov/VISN1/features/Peer_specialists_connect_over_virtual_coffee.asp.

Three Additional VISN 1 Medical Centers to Begin HRO Journey



Nursing and administrative staff at Manchester VA Medical Center participate in simulation training. The medical center's Education Department uses HRO principles to expand their curriculum. Photo by Marilyn Castagneto, Manchester VA Medical Center, N.H.

The VA New England Healthcare System will move forward in its journey to become a High Reliability Organization by adding three medical centers and their respective Community-Based Outpatient Clinics to its HRO strategic plan.

The VA New England Healthcare System, or VISN 1, started its HRO journey in 2019 with Manchester VA Medical Center in New Hampshire as its VISN 1 HRO Lead Site. The second phase of the VISN 1 HRO journey — known as HRO Cohort 2 — will include three

additional healthcare systems within the New England region, which include VA Connecticut HCS, VA Boston HCS, and VA Maine HCS.

The HRO program emphasizes proficiency in the intertwine connection between the HRO pillars: leadership commitment, safety culture, and continuous process improvement. HROs also focus on several guiding principles that ensure significant employee engagement and improve patient experience.

As VISN 1 gets more mature as an HRO, all staff — from front-line clinical providers to facility maintenance and housekeeping to administrative staff and leadership — will have the tools to be fully committed to the main HRO goal of zero harm.

VISN 1 Network Director Ryan Lilly noted recently that the commitment to ongoing improvement of VA's response to COVID-19 is even more important as VA medical centers look to expand the availability of services. Lilly says maintaining a team-oriented approach to care (an HRO imperative) has been invaluable during COVID-19.

"This is about a culture of safety and a commitment to zero harm that will involve all our medical centers and sites of care across our region," says Lilly. "As we expand our efforts, we expect all staff to embrace this commitment and make it front and center of everything we do."

The launch of the HRO program in VHA is called a journey because it does not have an end date. It will become the way VA medical centers in New England always do business, says Lilly.

Everyone is valued within an HRO

Lisa Doyon, VISN 1's Director of Performance Improvement, emphasized that employee safety is equally as important as Veteran patient care and safety. To that end, she says occupational safety will be a strong focus in all future HRO efforts.

That means following all procedures both in clinical and non-clinical settings, whether it's lifting patients, wearing non-skid shoes while on patient floors, or donning proper eye wear and protective clothing in construction or maintenance areas. For instance, in one medical center, a director walked through an area under construction to deliver breakfast to boiler plant staff.

"I am stopping you because it's not safe," a VA staff member said to the director. "And that's what we want to see everywhere — if it's not safe, stop what you are doing and speak up. And in VISN 1, we are doing it," says Doyon.

Each of the systems in VA New England have pledged to strive to become an HRO, where harm prevention and process improvement are second nature to all employees and guides decisions every day, says Doyon.



Members of the Manchester VA Medical Center's Sterile Processing team meet in a morning "Methods, Equipment, Supplies and Staffing" or "MESS" huddle. The team uses HRO principles for real-time problem solving. Photo by Marilyn Castagneto, Manchester VA Medical Center, N.H.

New HRO lead position filled

To help oversee the HRO roll-out and implementation, VA New England recently hired Irisbel Guzman-Sanchez as the system's full-time HRO lead — a position that will directly oversee and support HRO efforts across the VISN and work alongside Doyon.

Lessons learned and best practices from VISN 1 HRO Lead Site and Cohort 2 sites will help guide the rollout across the rest of VISN 1 medical facilities.

"We are excited to have three more of our VA healthcare systems joining the journey on the path toward becoming a High Reliability Organization," says Lilly. "VA New England has been a leader in patient safety for years. Our efforts to adopt high reliability principles at all of our sites of care are foremost in our commitment to deliver the best and safest health care for Veterans. We are proud to be among the first in the nation to start this journey."



Clinical leadership staff at Manchester VA Medical Center review the day's priorities following a staff huddle. Photo by Marilyn Castagneto, Manchester VA Medical Center, N.H.

VA New England Veteran Outreach Hits YouTube

Misunderstandings about VA health care and benefits can sometimes be widespread amongst Veterans. To combat any myths and to also provide ongoing education, a new YouTube program, SITREP, is on the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) YouTube channel.

In a recent series of “myths” segments, most no longer than a few minutes, SITREP hosts cover such topics as “Myth #1: You must be a combat Veteran to use VA health care” and “VA Myth #2: Veterans are automatically enrolled into VA health care.” These and many other SITREP videos have been produced by the VA New England Healthcare System since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new program airs once a month on the official VHA channel playlist and on VA’s “Veterans News Network.” The Myths series has been quite popular, garnering more than 40,000 views.

“Some Veterans think they are automatically enrolled in VA health care when they use other VA benefits,” says segment host Mike McNamara in the VA Myth #2 segment. “This is absolutely not true,” says McNamara, an Army



From a studio at the Bedford VA Medical Center in Massachusetts, Mike McNamara, left, and Paul Corbett co-host the “SITREP,” a new online program for Veterans about VA health care and benefits.

Veteran and VA New England’s Chief of Outreach, Community Education & Advertising, who explains VA health care eligibility in the SITREP video.

Even before the start of the pandemic, VA New England knew it would need to adapt its outreach program to reach Veterans. One strategy was to produce short and concise videos, says McNamara, whose team did extensive marketing research to determine the content Veterans most wanted to see, including conducting focus groups. “The feedback has been enormous,” he says.

The SITREP video format is modeled after a “situation report,” similar to what a Veteran would have received in the military. They are just one more way VISA 1 is finding creative ways to connect with Veterans and help keep them regularly informed.



Prominently featured on VHA’s YouTube channel, “SITREP” highlights military history and heritage. A recent segment noted the story of Air Force pilot, brigadier general and movie star, Jimmy Stewart.

SITREP Program Spotlights VA Benefits

Online videos on VA benefits are incredibly important during a time when many Veterans are physically and socially isolated, says Paul Corbett, a Marine Corps Veteran and VA New England marketing specialist, who along with McNamara co-produces and cohosts SITREP.

"This is information for Veterans to improve their knowledge about anything Veteran-related and about our VA," says Corbett, who created a studio set with portraits depicting military history as well as classic and easily recognizable props, such as green toy Army Soldiers. "We want to be upbeat, conversational and entertaining all with a purpose to drill down each month and break down the VA in easy-to-understand segments."



All VA New England communications are Veteran-centric and focus specifically on the information Veterans say they need to easily access VA benefits and services. Although the segments are produced out of VA New England's headquarters in Bedford, Mass., the content applies to any Veteran in the nation.

"Just as our health care has pivoted toward virtual care these past several months, we've made a big push to reach out to our Veterans in New England with helpful information that anyone can easily and quickly find online," says McNamara.

McNamara says the "new terrain" for VA outreach efforts going forward will be to embrace emerging formats like professionally produced videos and companion print articles to reach today's Veterans. So, stay tuned to this publication for links to future SITREP videos alongside related articles.

To view VA New England videos, visit VHA's YouTube channel and then click the Playlists tab to find a full suite of videos, including #theSITREP.



Mark Ramos, the public affairs officer for the Veterans Benefits Administration regional office in Providence, R.I., talks about the process for filing a VA disability claim during a recent segment of "SITREP."

New England Veteran

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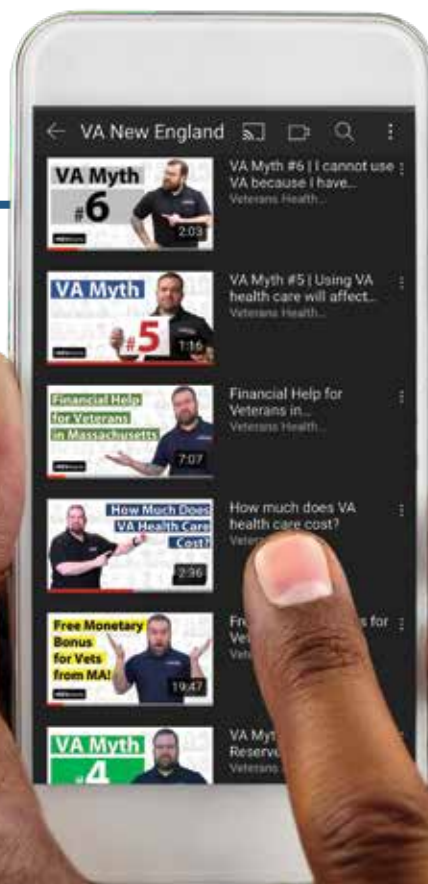
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Your Benefits. Our Commitment.

FALL 2020

**Resource guide
for VA benefits in
NEW ENGLAND.**



The 4 Most Common Misconceptions about VA Health Care

There are many misconceptions about VA health care. Outreach specialists at VA New England hear them all the time when they are out in the community or talking with Veterans.

Here are some of the most common misunderstandings. If you know of a Veteran who has additional questions, they can meet with eligibility and enrollment staff at any of our VA New England medical centers.



MYTH #1: You must have been in a combat zone to claim the title of Veteran.

TRUTH: Thousands of Veterans receiving benefits in New England have never been in a theatre of combat.

MYTH #2: I am automatically enrolled in VA health care once I enroll in and begin receiving benefits from the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

TRUTH: Though VA health care and VBA are both administrations under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, they do not share your personal information. If a Veteran is receiving VBA benefits, they should also take advantage of all their benefits by enrolling in VA health care.

MYTH #3: Using VA health care will take benefits away from fellow Veterans who need it more than me.

TRUTH: As more and more Veterans use VA health care, VA will hire additional health care professionals, build new clinics and hospitals, and add programs and services to meet the increased demand.

MYTH #4: I make too much money to utilize my VA benefits.

TRUTH: In New England, two out of three Veterans qualify for VA benefits. Moreover, there are numerous ways a Veteran can qualify for VA health care before income becomes a consideration. It's important that Veterans speak with an outreach specialist or enrollment and eligibility staff at their nearest VA medical center to determine their eligibility.



Scan the QR code or visit [youtube.com/watch?v=b4Ysw3x08jE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4Ysw3x08jE) to learn about 12 Myths about VA Health Care.

Getting Started: A Veteran's Testimonial

By Orville Grizzle, Outreach specialist

When I was about to retire from the Marine Corps in February of 2013, I wasn't completely sure how to apply for and receive VA services and benefits. Although I attended the military transition assistance program, "TAP," class at the Naval Submarine Base in New London, Conn., a few months prior to my retirement, I still had many questions.

I remember receiving a presentation from a representative from the U.S. Department of Veterans. And during my last duty assignment in the Marine Corps as a recruiter, I fortunately met a representative with the New Haven Vet Center in Connecticut, to whom I owe a lot in helping me enroll in my benefits and transition from the military. In hindsight, I think it's that personal one-on-one connection with a fellow Veteran that is key to helping us leave our military life — to me, that makes all the difference.

The Vet Center representative helped explain the disability rating process and what I needed to file for a service-connected disability. He linked me up with the Disabled American Veterans, or "DAV," Veterans Services Organization (VSO). That VSO helped me complete all the paperwork and ensured I had all the evidence and information needed to receive a disability rating from the VA.

Since my retirement, I have also used the post 9/11 GI Bill to earn a master's degree and have been working for the Department of Veterans Affairs for over seven years.

Just as someone once helped me, now I am a community outreach specialist, sharing information about VA health care and benefits.

Outreach specialists like me are useful because we have extensive knowledge about the ins and outs of all the various systems and certainly about the VA. It's important to ask as many questions as possible. We do our best to answer them and help you find what you need.



Five Steps for Making the Transition to Civilian Life



*By John Paradis,
Senior editor & writer*

While the public commonly perceives military members' returns to their community as joyful and idyllic, the post-service transition can be formidable and overwhelming. But being informed at the outset can help you have an easier transition.



Here are the top 5 things every Veteran should know.

1. SAFEGUARD YOUR DD 214.

All Veterans should know their eligibility for Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and what they are also entitled to under state laws. Your DD Form 214, or "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty," is the proof you need to apply for benefits. Safeguard your DD 214 discharge papers, make multiple copies, and tell your family where the copies are located.

2. MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH A CERTIFIED SERVICE OFFICER.

Veteran Service Organizations, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans, have volunteers who offer free services. They can help you gather the information necessary to support a claim, file a claim and track the claim through the VA system. You may be eligible for multiple benefits.

3. CONNECT WITH OTHER VETERANS.

No Veteran is alone. No one understands military culture, traditions, and the hardships Veterans face when they transition to civilian life better than another Veteran. There are several outreach events throughout the year, including virtual ones during the pandemic, where Veterans can meet other Veterans and share common concerns and challenges.

4. KNOW HOW TO POSITION YOUR SKILLS.

Veterans often have difficulty transitioning to the civilian job market. Many don't know how to position their military background and skills in applying for work. A Veterans' employment counselor can connect employers with Veterans and help with job readiness, such as developing a comprehensive job and training plan.

5. SIGN UP FOR HEALTH CARE.

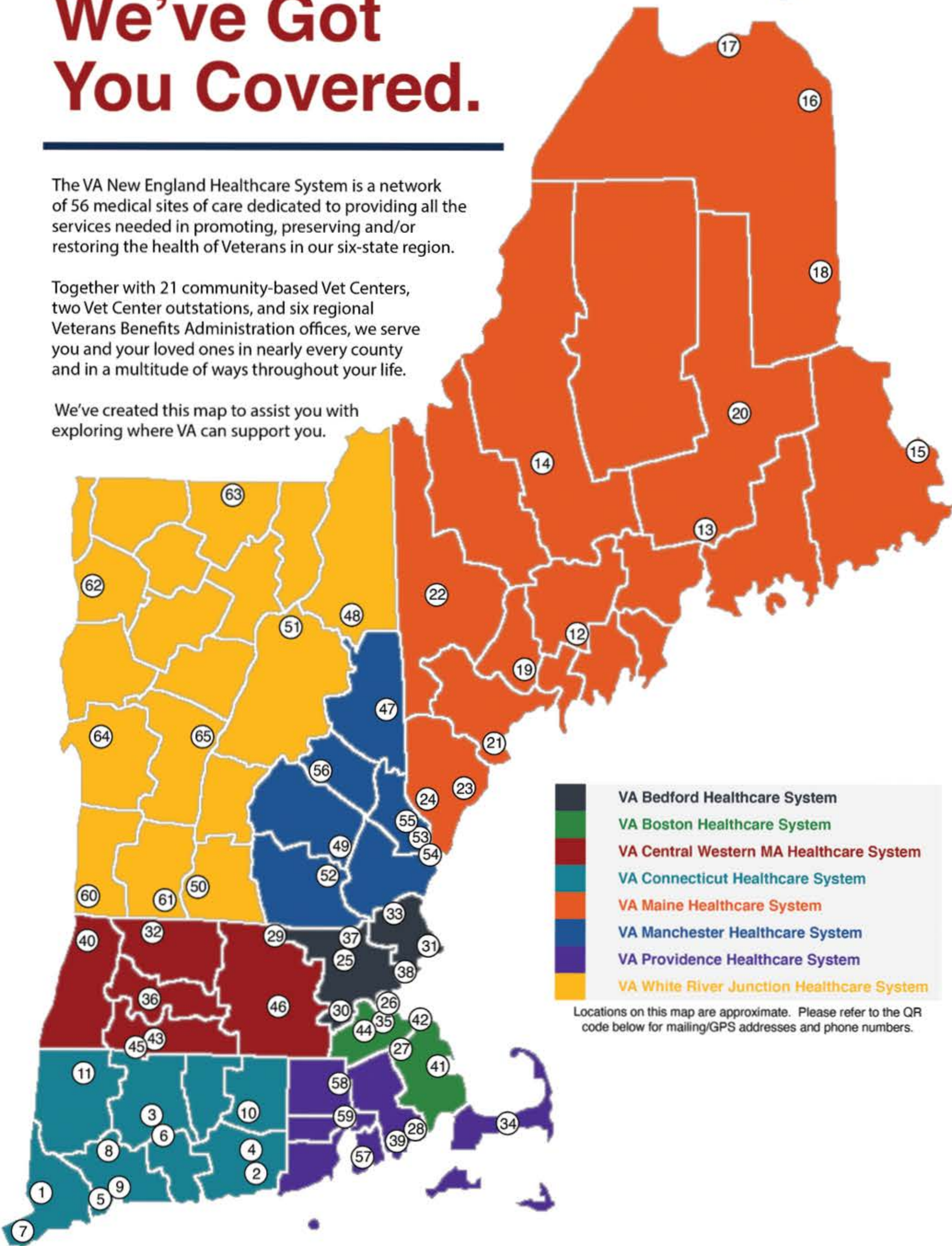
Even if you don't need to use VA health care, we encourage every Veteran to sign up. Our VA New England Healthcare System is top-rated and we receive exceptional patient experience scores. The more Veterans that enroll, the more funding there is to treat fellow Veterans. See our fold-out map in this special edition to find a VA medical center nearest you.

We've Got You Covered.

The VA New England Healthcare System is a network of 56 medical sites of care dedicated to providing all the services needed in promoting, preserving and/or restoring the health of Veterans in our six-state region.

Together with 21 community-based Vet Centers, two Vet Center outstations, and six regional Veterans Benefits Administration offices, we serve you and your loved ones in nearly every county and in a multitude of ways throughout your life.

We've created this map to assist you with exploring where VA can support you.



CONNECTICUT			
1	Danbury	Danbury VA Clinic	
	Danbury	Danbury Vet Center	
2	New London	John J. McGuirk VA Clinic	
3	Newington	Newington VA Medical Center	
	Newington	Veterans Benefits Administration	
4	Norwich	Norwich Vet Center	
5	Orange	New Haven Vet Center	
6	Rocky Hill	Hartford Vet Center	
7	Stamford	Stamford VA Clinic	
8	Waterbury	Waterbury VA Clinic	
9	West Haven	West Haven VA Medical Center	
	West Haven	Errera VA Clinic	
10	Willimantic	Willimantic VA Clinic	
11	Winsted	Winsted VA Clinic	
MAINE			
12	Augusta	Togus VA Medical Center	
	Augusta	Veterans Benefits Administration	
13	Bangor	Bangor VA Clinic	
	Bangor	Bangor Vet Center	
14	Bingham	Mobile Medical Unit	
15	Calais	Calais VA Clinic	
16	Caribou	Caribou VA Clinic	
	Caribou	Northern Maine Vet Center	
17	Fort Kent	Fort Kent VA Clinic	
18	Houlton	Houlton VA Clinic	
19	Lewiston	Lewiston/Auburn VA Clinic	
	Lewiston	Lewiston Vet Center	
20	Lincoln	Lincoln VA Clinic	
21	Portland	Portland VA Clinic	
	Portland	Portland Vet Center	
22	Rumford	Rumford VA Clinic	
23	Saco	Caso VA Clinic	
24	Springvale	Sanford Vet Center	
MASSACHUSETTS			
25	Bedford	Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital	
26	Boston	Causeway VA Clinic	
	Boston	Veterans Benefits Administration	
	Boston	Boston Vet Center	
27	Brockton	Brockton VA Medical Center	
	Brockton	Brockton Vet Center	
28	Fairhaven	New Bedford Vet Center	
29	Fitchburg	Fitchburg VA Clinic	
30	Framingham	Framingham VA Clinic	
31	Gloucester	Gloucester VA Clinic	
32	Greenfield	Greenfield VA Clinic	
33	Haverhill	Haverhill VA Clinic	
34	Hyannis	Hyannis VA Clinic	
	Hyannis	Cape Cod Vet Center	
35	Jamaica Plain	Jamaica Plain VA Medical Center	
36	Leeds	Northampton VA Medical Center	
37	Lowell	Lowell VA Clinic	
	Lowell	Community Care Center	
	Lowell	Lowell Vet Center	
38	Lynn	Lynn VA Clinic	
39	New Bedford	New Bedford VA Clinic	
40	Pittsfield	Pittsfield VA Clinic	
41	Plymouth	Plymouth VA Clinic	
42	Quincy	Quincy VA Clinic	
43	Springfield	Springfield VA Clinic	
44	West Roxbury	West Roxbury VA Medical Center	
45	West Springfield	Springfield Vet Center	
46	Worcester	Worcester VA Clinic	
	Worcester	Worcester Vet Center	
NEW HAMPSHIRE			
47	Conway	Conway VA Clinic	
48	Gorham	Berlin Vet Center	
49	Hooksett	Manchester Vet Center	
50	Keene	Keene VA Clinic	
	Keene	Keene Vet Center	
51	Littleton	Littleton VA Clinic	
52	Manchester	Manchester VA Medical Center	
	Manchester	Veterans Benefits Administration	
53	Newington	Newington Vet Center	
54	Portsmouth	Portsmouth VA Clinic	
55	Somersworth	Somersworth VA Clinic	
56	Tilton	Tilton VA Clinic	
RHODE ISLAND			
57	Middletown	Middletown VA Clinic	
58	Providence	Providence VA Medical Center	
	Providence	Veterans Benefits Administration	
59	Warwick	Providence Vet Center	
VERMONT			
60	Bennington	Bennington VA Clinic	
61	Brattleboro	Brattleboro VA Clinic	
62	Burlington	Burlington VA Clinic	
	Burlington	South Burlington Vet Center	
63	Newport	Newport VA Clinic	
64	Rutland	Rutland VA Clinic	
65	White River Junction	White River Junction VA Medical Center	
	White River Junction	Veterans Benefits Administration	
	White River Junction	White River Junction Vet Center	

VA Health

844-VA-CARES

VA Benefits

800-827-1000

Vet Center

877-WAR-VETS

Scan for
addresses
and phone
numbers

