

Horizons

A NEWSLETTER OF WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER // SEPTEMBER 2021



To access our new
Wilkes-Barre VA website,
follow the link below:
[www.va.gov/wilkes-barre-
health-care/](http://www.va.gov/wilkes-barre-health-care/)

WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER ONE OF THE FIRST TO GO LIVE WITH NEW VA WEBSITE

If you, a family member, or a caregiver of a Veteran have been accessing the VA website recently, you may have noticed a few changes. The Department of Veterans Affairs decided to revamp its websites nationwide, including the one here in Wilkes-Barre. In fact, the Wilkes-Barre VA was one of the first VA Medical Centers in the county to go live with the new website format.

In the past, Veterans had experienced frustration navigating and logging into web pages to find what they needed. After gaining feedback from over 5,000 previous VA website users, the VA adopted a more Veteran-focused platform.

The new website design contains homepage content that focuses on the top 20 tasks that 80 percent of VA web customers need. After logging in, Veterans receive a personalized experience with easy-to-understand plain language content. The main page has links to refill and track your prescriptions, communicate with your healthcare team, schedule and manage health appointments, view lab and test results, download your VA medical records and much more. All these features can also be accessed on any mobile device. For example, when you try to find the nearest facility while using the website on your phone, it uses your location, and will even load google maps with driving directions or let you call the VA facility by just tapping your screen.

The VA had three core goals they wanted to accomplish through the website redesign - increasing the use of self-service tools among VA customers, decreasing the wait time for a response from VA, and delivering an overall more satisfying customer experience. In accomplishing these goals, it makes it easier for Veterans to navigate the website and find what they need in a quick, efficient manner.

A Message from the Director



At the Wilkes-Barre VA we strive to provide the highest standard of care for our Veterans. When we have an opportunity to recognize areas within our healthcare system that uphold these high standards, it's very gratifying.

I'm pleased to announce that the Wilkes-Barre VA Dental Clinic, which includes our Allentown Outpatient Dental Clinic, has achieved the #1 ranking out of all the VA Dental Clinics nationwide in productivity and efficiency from the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Dentistry. Congratulations goes out to the entire Dental Staff for their diligent work serving our Veterans.

Additionally, the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center's Community Living Center (CLC) has been recognized as an Age-Friendly Health System - Committed to Care Excellence Facility.

Age-Friendly Health Systems is an initiative of The John A. Hartford Foundation and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), in partnership with the American Hospital Association (AHA) and the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA).

Becoming an Age-Friendly Health System entails reliably providing a set of four evidence-based elements of high-quality care, known as the "4Ms," to all older adults at our facility: What Matters, Medication, Mentation, and Mobility. This recognition shows what an excellent job our CLC staff accomplishes daily helping our Veterans live their best quality of life.

Congratulations again to both the Dental and CLC staffs, your attention to detail and caring for our Veterans is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Russell E Lloyd, Director



Wilkes-Barre VA Assists in Veteran Transfer After Stroke

The VA has always been very concerned with the mental health of Soldiers returning home from combat, with many of them struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Thankfully, there are a few programs within the VA that can help Veterans cope with this condition. A couple of years ago, Dominick Andriola, a 36-year-old Marine Corps Veteran, realized that he needed help dealing with his PTSD. So, he decided to enroll in a highly regarded PTSD VA clinic in Aurora, Colorado. Little did Dominick know; his healing stay in Colorado would take a tragic turn.

"A little over a year ago, while driving, Dominick suddenly experienced a hypertensive hemorrhagic stroke, which means that his blood pressure spiked to the point where a blood vessel burst deep inside his brain. After crashing his car, Dominick was rushed to the Denver VA Hospital where neurosurgeons performed multiple surgeries that saved his life but left him in a coma.

After months of incredible care from the team at the Denver VA, Dominick regained consciousness and eventually experienced some movement in his right hand and leg. Unfortunately, he remains on a feeding tube and may never regain the ability to speak or walk again. Dominick will likely need ongoing, daily care, for the rest of his life."

—Diana Andriola, Sister

Dominick and his family are very close and have made numerous trips, cross-country, to be by his side from their Stroudsburg, PA home. Making these trips became tougher this past year because Dominick's Mother had experienced medical setbacks of her own. At this point, the family was desperate to get Dominick back closer to home.

The Department of Veterans Affairs mission is to care for those "who shall have borne the battle" and for their families, caregivers and survivors. At the Wilkes-Barre VA, our goal was to help Dominick and his family any way we could.

With Dominick's condition stabilized, the family was able to get him transferred from the Denver VA to the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center's five-star Community Living Center, which is about 52 miles from their Stroudsburg home.

"Support of family and friends are huge factors in stroke recovery, and we are so grateful that we can spend time with him and help keep him positive. Dominick has made so much progress and we are hopeful that his incremental gains will continue."

—Diana Andriola – Sister

While Dominick's family knows he has a long road ahead of him, they want him to be able to live his life to the fullest. Through the cooperation of many, the Wilkes-Barre VA has been able to provide the Andriola family the level of care they needed, while maintaining the best quality of life possible for Dominick.

The Andriola family which includes Dominick's two sisters, a brother, and many extended family members are so grateful that the Wilkes-Barre VA had the facility to be able to bring Dominick back closer to home. Having family close to spend time with him makes all the difference.

Wilkes-Barre VA Women's Health Position Filled by a Familiar Face

Since the retirement of the previous Women's Health Program Manager earlier this year, the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center has been searching to fill that vacancy. Well, that position has been filled by a familiar face who has been helping Veterans here at the Wilkes-Barre VA for years, Amanda Olaviany. Amanda previously worked in the Mental Health area in Suicide Prevention prior to taking her new position.

"I feel my background in Mental Health is a beneficial component to the Women's Health Program. Given the current times and conditions, many are struggling not with just physical health, but also their mental health. My previous experiences in mental health and suicide prevention can be utilized to assist Women Veterans with their individual needs, but also to help guide and direct the overall Women's Health Program."

—Amanda Olaviany, Wilkes-Barre VA Women's Health Program Manager

Amanda also feels that the Women's Health Program at the Wilkes-Barre VA is deeply rooted in providing high quality care to Women Veterans. She would like to continue that tradition but would also like to see the program continue to move in a direction that supports the Whole Health Model of Care. She believes that it is vitally important for Women Veterans to focus on all aspects of their well-being, including physical health, mental and emotional healing, spirituality, home environment, relationships, nutrition, and personal development.

Amanda can be reached by email: amanda.olaviany@va.gov or by phone: 570-824-3521 Ext. 27827.

Amanda's goal is to ensure the Women Veterans who utilize the Wilkes-Barre VA have the opportunity to support all aspects of their health and well-being, through increased communication on health and wellness topics, open communication with the Women's Health Program staff, opportunities to connect with other Veterans, and a welcoming environment at the VA to support all women.



Memorabilia Area Features New Displays

If you get a chance to visit the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center, whether as a patient or guest, you will find some interesting new displays on the 1st floor.



Coming into the hospital these days usually means you have a doctor's appointment, prescription pickup, health testing or all the aforementioned. Many Veterans try to schedule all their stops the same day and may have some downtime in between appointments. If you find yourself with the time, head over to the 1st floor Memorabilia Area and connected hallway to check out our new additions.

One thing that is hard to miss is the sprawling Civil war display at the entrance to the memorabilia area. The display depicts the third and final day of the Battle of Gettysburg – Pickett's Charge, which was the tipping point of the Civil War.

This 1/72 Scale display model was the creation of many Community Living Center (CLC) Residents and Wilkes-Barre VA Recreation Therapy Assistant William Roberts. The inspiration to make the Civil War display came from two separate trips CLC Residents made to the Gettysburg battle fields.

"I'm sort of a Civil War nut, so I had a large allotment of soldiers already painted that I didn't know exactly what to do with. This became the starting point for the Pickett's Charge display."

—William T. Roberts, Therapy Assistant - Wilkes-Barre VA

The project started over six years ago with battlefield woodworking being done by CLC Veterans and field parts being made by others. One of the goals was to create realistic terrain and elevation changes that mimic the actual battlefield to demonstrate what the soldiers were experiencing. In researching Pickett's Charge, the Union Soldiers were outmanned but occupied the higher ground. Confederate Brigadier General George E. Pickett was ordered by General Robert E. Lee, to rush the center of the Union position through a mile of unprotected farmland and over Emmitsburg Road, which was protected by two fences. As the Confederate Army led the charge, they became easy targets for the Union Soldiers mounted on higher ground (this moment is clearly depicted in the display). This daring strategy ultimately proves a disastrous sacrifice for the Confederates, with casualties approaching 60 percent. Repulsed by close-range Union rifle and artillery fire, the Confederates retreat.

"The display turned out to be much bigger than we planned. Every one of the over 600 soldiers were hand painted by me and another Veteran. Trees were built, Emmitsburg Road fence was erected, and cotton was used to depict the cannon fire smoke."

—William T. Roberts, Therapy Assistant - Wilkes-Barre VA

The building of the Pickett's Charge display allowed our CLC Residents to participate as a form of therapy as well as raise the visibility of their creative talents. Job well done.

In addition to the Pickett's Charge display, the VA installed a series of military uniform shadow boxes in the connecting hallway coming from the Memorabilia Area towards the Dental Clinic. This collection is composed of Uniforms that were donated to the Medical Center by area soldiers.

"Veterans and guests can get a first-hand look at the uniforms of the various eras, it's a really nice addition to the Medical Center."

—Ron Skamanich, Volunteer curator, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center



EIGHT CONVENIENT LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU

Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center
1111 East End Blvd., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
570-824-3521 / 877-928-2621

Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic
3110 Hamilton Blvd., Allentown, PA 18103
610-599-0127

Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
225 Columbia Mall Drive, Bloomsburg, PA 17815
570-316-4116

Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
701 Slate Belt Blvd., Bangor, PA 18013-9341
610-599-0127

Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic
1537 Elmira Street, Sayre, PA 18840
570-888-6803

Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic
Tobyhanna Army Depot, Bldg. 220
Tobyhanna, PA 18466
570-615-8341

Wayne County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
600 Maple Avenue, Honesdale, PA 18431
570-251-6543

Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic
1705 Warren Avenue, 3rd Fl., Ste. 304
Williamsport, PA 17701
570-322-4791

CREATIVE ARTS COMPETITION WORKS

on Display at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

Across the country each year, Veterans enrolled at VA health care facilities compete in a local creative arts competition. The competition includes over 150 categories pertaining to art, writing, and the performing arts of dance, drama, and music.

Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities nationwide including the Wilkes-Barre VA use creative arts as one form of rehabilitative treatment to help Veterans recover from and cope with physical and emotional disabilities.

Over 20 Veterans participated in this year's 13th annual Local Veterans Creative Arts Competition hosted by the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. First place winners in the local phase of the creative arts competition advance to a national judging phase and

selected gold-medal-winning Veterans are invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival hosted by a different VA facility each year.

The Wilkes-Barre VA is proudly displaying all of this year's art submissions in display cases in the lobby on the ground of the medical center. If you're visiting VA for an appointment, make sure you stop by and check out the amazing work.



Call Center
1-877-928-2621

CONNECT WITH US

ONLINE
wilkes-barre.va.gov

FACEBOOK
facebook.com/VAWilkesBarre

