



# Choose **VA**

Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center Veteran Newsletter

**U.S. Secretary for Veterans Affairs  
Robert Wilkie visits the Crescenz  
VA Medical Center**





# DIRECTOR'S CORNER

The last few months have been full of important events at the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center (CMCVAMC). In Cardiology, we opened our new Cardiac Catheterization Lab where we are now one of a select number of VA medical centers authorized to do certain cardiac procedures, such as cardiac ablations. Through a Right-To-Try agreement, signed off on by Executive-in-Charge, Dr. Richard Stone, we are helping one of our patients receive the latest therapy for ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease. His story will be featured on both ABC Nightline and as a one-hour documentary on HULU.

Recently, we also provided the Philadelphia region's only "Eye Gaze" wheelchair to another one of our ALS Veterans.

This wheelchair allows him to use his eyes to control the movements of his wheelchair. Our Research Lab continues to conduct groundbreaking research in PTSD, Sleep Disorders, and the Million Veteran Program that contains the world's largest database of DNA samples.

Our VA researchers are using the samples to help predict diseases based on genetics before they manifest in order to intervene early with treatments or, possibly eliminate its occurrence entirely. Our Prosthetics program held its annual Amputee Golf Tournament and Adaptive Cycling Clinic. Suicide Prevention, Homeless and Transitional Work programs have made great strides and impacted hundreds of lives in their respective programs.

The Behavioral Health department's use of alternative therapies to address addiction and mental health issues is being recognized nationally. Through the Mission Act, we are expanding our support services to caregivers of Veterans no matter what conflict they served in.

Recently at Crescenz, our efforts to deliver high quality service were recognized on October 17, 2019 by Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Robert Wilkie

[read the inside story].

This year, the VA designated the entire month of November Veterans Month. In celebration, we held a number of events. Veterans were visited by players from the Philadelphia Eagles as part of Toyota's 'Salute to Service' as well as Tails of Valor (puppies).

We hosted the 2019 Women Veteran Trailblazers Roadshow and one local trailblazer shared their experience at the opening reception. Medal of Honor recipient U.S. Army Staff Sergeant David G. Bellavia spoke to staff and Veterans about the historic Battle of Al Fallujah. The U.S. Army's Six String Soldiers delighted us with their Bluegrass music as did the Community Academy of Philadelphia Charter School Choir. On behalf of the entire staff of the CMCVAMC, I salute each and every one of you for your service to country. As a Veteran myself, I am proud to have served and share that bond with my colleagues. When a young woman or man raises their hand to serve their country and our freedoms, the entire family serves. Our mission is to serve those who served us so honorably. This begins with me and permeates to every level of the organization, every office and point of service. As we move forward into 2020, remember, we're here to serve you -- from our telephone operators, to our clinical staff, canteen workers, to VA police and all Crescenz staff -- our mission is you! We want you to Choose VA for all your healthcare needs. Happy Holidays to you and yours, and a very Happy New Year.

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## Veterans Day Celebration

Veterans were all smiles when they were treated to cake and ice cream for Veterans Day by Veterans Canteen Services (VCS). The Veterans Day cake was designed with an emblem from each branch of the military. To help cut the cake were Dennis Goslee Sr. from Veteran Canteen Services and Associate Director for Support Services Latriece Prince-Wheeler. Veterans Canteen Services Chief Rezaur Rahman looked on.

## Crescenz Veterans News/Updates

**CNN Online** – *The Great Big Story*: Veteran Charles King's story is featured.

<https://www.greatbigstory.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/greatbigstory>

**Veterans Job Fair** – Friday, Jan. 10, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., 3rd floor MPR, Crescenz VA Medical Center, 3900 Woodland Avenue. FREE Business Attire will be given away.

Every Monday and Wednesday beginning Jan. 6, 2020, from 10 a.m. -1 p.m. The U.S. Census will be onsite recruiting Veterans for Census jobs. Follow us on Facebook for more information.

**Telephone System Upgrades:** The CMCVAMC recently upgraded its telephone system. Now, when you call in, you must dial "20" before EVERY EXTENSION, i.e. 20-1234. Remember: (215) 823-5800, ext. 20-XXXX.





## Trailblazers 2019

There are women who selflessly put 'self' aside and forge a path to open doors for those who follow them. Such a woman is known as a trailblazer. In the military, women Veterans have not always had the easiest road in performing their service. They enlisted, took the oath and, like their male counterparts, offered themselves up in service to their country. Many of these women Veterans entered military careers not looking to be a trailblazer or pioneer, but their work ethic, determination, drive and acts of selflessness led them to become just that in every branch of the military. Some faced obstacles and roadblocks, others prejudice and harassment, while serving. Those who persevered, forged a road, kicked open a door or tore down a wall for women Veterans to follow.

These pioneering women Veterans distinguished themselves, not as women, but as soldiers and officers in their chosen professions. Among these trailblazers is Army E-5 Veteran, Cathy Bennett-Santos, a north Philadelphia native and part of the Crescenzo family of health care.

Recently, Bennett-Santos was recognized by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Center for Women Veterans, as a 2019 Women Veteran Trailblazer. The Women Veteran Trailblazer Campaign highlights the experiences,

accomplishments and contributions of 15 amazing women Veterans, including Bennett-Santos, who have distinguished themselves among their peers.

"I come from a background that instilled in me a sense of strength, pride, and dedication to country," said Bennett-Santos. "I'm proud to have had parents that developed in me the character that is the foundation I stand upon today. I was taught at a very young age to be proud, that I could achieve anything and there was not a challenge I could not defeat. This mindset allowed me to see that being recognized as a trailblazer was the beginning of a new chapter for me, the opening of a new door if you may, and will hopefully allow those women that follow me, a little easier path."

Bennett-Santos is the founder of the National Alliance of Women Veterans Incorporated, a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) that advocates for issues affecting women who served in the armed forces, including military sexual trauma (MST), health care and homelessness, to name a few. Her groundbreaking efforts to ensure that women Veterans seeking care at VA hospitals are automatically assessed for MST and that programs are in place to address MST, grew out of her own experience in the military and her fight on Capitol Hill to have legislation enacted to address this important issue.

"I founded this organization, which is the first premier women Veterans' organization, as an impetus for healing, educating and empowering women who served in the armed forces," she said.

Bennett-Santos was at the forefront of fighting for a seat at the table for women Veterans across many different issues. She has had the proverbial door closed in her face but was not deterred. She was too determined to be a change agent for women Veterans. Whether it was her very public fight with the U.S. Army during her Military Sexual Trauma (MST) case or fighting for more compassionate treatment of women Veterans who have experienced MST "They all needed to know I was not going to back down," she stated.

Today, the fruits of her labors and battles have been recognized by the VA as a 2019 Trailblazer. "I'm so honored to be selected as a Trailblazer. It's a privilege and humbling to be among this group of high achieving and distinguished Veterans. It truly is an honor that makes all my struggles worthwhile."

[Click on this link to be humbled by Bennett-Santos' and the other Trailblazer's accomplishments and life stories.](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=EGMoXqoFPRg)  
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=EGMoXqoFPRg>









# On The Move

With U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie

After weeks of preparation it was time for the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center to welcome a very prestigious guest – Robert Wilkie, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on October 17, 2019.

Secretary Wilkie was touring several VA facilities across the country and in Pennsylvania he chose Crescenz, the VBA Regional Office, along with the Pittsburgh VAMC. The Secretary had heard about the work we were doing and stopped by for a quick visit. He was met by VISN 4 Network Director, Tim Liezert, and Crescenz Medical Center Director, Karen Flaherty-Oxler.

During his visit, leadership at both the hospital and the West Philadelphia CBOC, briefed him on our programmatic functions, accomplishments, challenges and objectives. Issues discussed included our work in implementing the MISSION Act, Customer Service, Suicide Prevention, Telehealth, Whole Health and alternative methods to treat chronic pain. He was also briefed on our world-renowned Research program, and the robust relationship with our academic affiliate, the University of Pennsylvania.





After his briefing sessions, the Secretary held Coin Recognition Ceremonies at both locations. At the ceremonies he handed out his personal "Secretary of Veterans Affairs" Challenge coins. The coins were presented to Crescenz employees recognized amongst their peers for outstanding contributions to the safety, efficiency and productivity of the facility.

#### **Awardees included:**

- Ifeanyi Anadu, Associate Chief of Pharmacy
- Jae Ryu, Pharmacist
- Kristina Tait, Nurse Manager, Medicine Specialty Clinics
- Dr. Jason Brant, Neurotologist
- Dr. Benjamin Rubin, Chief of Anesthesiology
- Dr. Colin Quinn, Neurologist
- Chasity Gary, Supervisory Social Worker, Office of Community Care
- Tarideana Breazeale, Program Specialist, Office of Community Care
- MaryAnn Pizzo, Supervisory HR Specialist
- Vanessa Myers, Nurse Manager, West Philadelphia CBOC
- Nisha Nayak, PhD, Psychologist & Tobacco Program Director
- Joan Rucker, Clinical Documentation Improvement (CDI) Manager

After the Secretary's presentations at the hospital, he toured the newly renovated PACU/SPU and the Cardiac Catheterization lab to hear about the recent start of cardiac ablation procedures before traveling to the new West Philadelphia CBOC, which opened in May of this year. While touring, Mr. Wilkie enjoyed stopping to talk to Veterans, volunteers and staff.

He was very impressed by what he heard and learned during his brief visit and stated he intends to come back again. Enjoy the photographs documenting his time with us.





Retired Lieutenant Commander **Matthew “Matt” Bellina** has always given 100% to all his pursuits.

After graduating from Virginia Tech in 2005, he received his commission into the U.S. Navy where he served as a Naval Aviator. His naval training bred in him a determination and resolve to never give up. He had no idea that fighting spirit groomed in the Navy, would be needed to combat the fight of his life.

In 2006 Matt began to show early signs of the debilitating and terminal disease Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. Once detected, his flying days were over, and he was assigned administrative duties. In 2014 with an official diagnosis, he was medically retired.

“I was determined to fight back against ALS for my wife and kids,” said Matt. “Giving up was not an option. The Navy trained me to not quit, and I wasn’t going to start now,” he added.

Matt drilled down deep into every available medical treatment, research study and medical professional working on ALS which led him to a young doctor and researcher at the University of Massachusetts named, Dr. Colin Quinn, the leading ALS researcher in the nation.

“In 2014 Matt reached out to me about an ALS research trial involving stem cells at the University of Massachusetts. I was touched reading his letter and corresponded with him briefly about trying to get him into the trial. Unfortunately, things did not work out

at that time,” said Dr. Quinn. “I had no idea that, years down the road our paths would cross again at the Crescenz VA Medical Center,” he added.

Matt’s disease continued to progress, albeit slowly. “I was receiving care at a non-VA hospital and had exhausted all available treatments with them. They knew that the VA was doing research and had a specialty clinic for ALS and suggested, as a Veteran, I move my care there,” he said.

In 2015, Matt transferred his care to Crescenz VA Medical Center, where, by coincidence, Dr. Quinn had joined the staff and started an ALS multidisciplinary clinic. In clinic they frequently discussed experimental treatments, but Matt no longer qualified for most trials due to the length of time he had been sick. During this time a new trial involving stem cell therapy was being used. It was the same trial Matt had originally approached Dr. Quinn about, but once again, he didn’t qualify. But Matt did not give up. He began to lobby Congress and his advocacy work paid off and led to the ‘Trickett Wendler, Frank Mongiello, Jordan McLinn, and Matthew Bellina Right to Try Act of 2017, also known as the Right to Try (RTT) Act of 2018. RTT provides patients with terminal diseases early access to drugs under investigation, but not yet approved for clinical use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Matt approached the company Brainstorm, that treats the stem cells, and Dr. Quinn about receiving stem cells through Right to Try. Dr. Quinn reviewed Matt’s clinical status and confirmed that he was not eligible for any other available clinical trials, so Matt, Dr. Quinn and the rest of Matt’s Crescenz VA medical team decided to investigate Right to Try.

Crescenz medical leaders and VHA leadership worked out an agreement with Brainstorm to use its product, NurOwn (the proprietary stem cells used to treat ALS) in order to provide Matt access. Brainstorm was so moved by Matt’s story that they agreed to provide him the stem cells at no cost to Matt or the VA. Crescenz medical staff, including Chief of Anesthesia, Dr. Benjamin Rubin, and a team of dedicated nurses were put into place. Working together, they had to develop a specific treatment protocol and procedures working with Brainstorm to treat Matt’s own stem cells.

“My ability to participate in stem cell research through RTT would not have been possible without the VA,” said Bellina. “From August to October 2018, in just a matter of months, the VA made this happen for me. The VA is the leading medical facility for ALS treatment and



Veterans with ALS receive the best care available for the disease at the VA. That's why I choose VA for my medical care and recommend that all Veterans come here for their medical care," he stated.

ABC News Nightline has produced a one-hour documentary about ALS, Matt and his family and Matt's medical team here. An air date has not been released yet, so check upcoming editions of Choose VA or follow us on Facebook, for more information.

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When having conversations with Veterans about where they receive medical care, there are always things that resonate as being important. They range from privacy, to being respected, to communication to feeling a sense of trust.

At the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center (CMCVAMC), it is important that we understand why Veterans choose VA. It provides us feedback, allowing us to communicate more effectively to those Veterans who are eligible, but not receiving VA health care.

One of the most recent discussions was with **L. Bunny Johnson**. Ms. Johnson is a retired Air Force Senior Master Sergeant/E8 with more than 33+ years of service spanning the Vietnam to Gulf eras. She is an active member of CMCVAMC's Veteran Advisory Board and continues to find ways to be active within her local community to advocate for Veterans issues.

Our conversation started with what makes you proud to be a Veteran?

"Well, I must start with a definition first, a Veteran is a person who is known to have had a long period of work," she said. "Personally, I was raised with a strong belief in the worthiness of a job and the thought if you do something you like, it is NOT work. I performed a service for 33+ years that wasn't work, it was something I loved to do and I'm proud to be a military Veteran."

Ms. Johnson is known as a great advocate for Veterans, especially women Veterans. She tells us why she chose Crescenz for her health care. "I needed help after my stroke. I went with familiarity, but I continue here because of a few reasons; trust, the people (atmosphere) and because they met my needs. Often, I feel we forget just how familiar with treating military Veterans the VA is. That's why I chose VA and why I feel Veterans should choose VA, it's where you feel more like family, and not just a number. The VA offers military Veterans the availability to control their care and life. That's important to me."

Johnson added, "I feel great about the care I receive at the facility. I've been blessed to have women health providers who I trust, who are open, forthcoming and honest with me. Since they moved to the 9th floor, providing women Veterans the privacy we need, things have been excellent. Things have gone from better to the best. I really enjoy my care team and am proud to be a military Veteran receiving my care here."

**The Women's Health Battlefield Acupuncture Clinic for chronic pain is starting January 6th, and will be open on Monday afternoons. To schedule, contact Central Scheduling at (215) 823-4014 and ask for an appointment in the PHL Womens' Health BFA Clinic.**

**This clinic is open to women Veterans who currently receive care at CMCVAMC. For questions, contact your Primary Care provider.**



# Health & Wellness Services



## INTRO TO YOGA:

Restorative, alignment-based hatha yoga movements, specifically designed to foster a healthy back and help decrease fear of movement. Tuesdays 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-3756

## TAI CHI WITH MARCUS:

Balance, strength, flexibility, mobility and stress reduction. Discover what is known as the Supreme Ultimate martial art as you find balance and harmony, physically, and mentally, through the practice of Tai Chi.

Mondays 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Drop in 3rd floor Multipurpose Room

Please contact (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-3756

## WHOLE HEALTH FOR CHRONIC PAIN-PAIN SCHOOL:

A 7-week class with teachers from different specialties that address the whole picture of living with chronic pain.

Thursdays 1 - 3 p.m. Call (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-4020 for more info.

## STRESS MANAGEMENT:

Chronic stress can take a toll on both your physical and emotional health. Learn how to minimize the impact of daily stressors.

Mondays, 9 - 10 a.m. Mod A Conference room.

No appointment needed at CMCVAMC (also delivered via telehealth to community outpatient clinics).

Dr. Rebecca Helms (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-2036

## DIABETES NUTRITION EDUCATION CLASS:

Everything you need to know about managing your diabetes through dietary changes.

1st Tuesday of the month from 2 - 3 p.m.

Sahima Das (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-3966

## Not all medicine comes in a bottle:

*Helping you achieve optimal health and well-being*

## DIABETES SELF-MANAGEMENT TRAINING:

A comprehensive look at effective diabetes management: healthy eating, blood sugar monitoring and medications.

1st and 3rd Friday from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Sue Thompson (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-4175

## GATEWAY TO HEALTHY LIVING:

A single session that provides information on CMCVAMC's healthy living program. During this 60-minute session, you will take part in a discussion about healthy lifestyle choices and learn ways to identify and reach your goal. Walk-ins welcome.

Mondays from 10 - 11 a.m. 2nd floor room B221 (MIRECC conference room).

Dr. Rebecca Helms (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-2036

## HEALTHY AGING (Veterans > 65):

Ever wonder, "Is this a normal part of getting older? How can I still be healthy with all the changes in my body?" Come join us for 4 classes on healthy aging and matters that account for your whole health such as relaxation, healthy eating, memory and attention tips, and more!

Tuesdays from 12 - 1 p.m.

Dr. Radhika Pasupuleti (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-4739

## HEART HEALTHY CLASS:

Learn how to eat healthy to protect your heart! Meet with a dietitian to learn about diets low in sodium, cholesterol, saturated fat, and sugar.

1st Wednesday of the month from 2 - 3 p.m.

Sahima Das (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-3966

## TINNITUS MANAGEMENT:

A 5-session interdisciplinary program designed to provide Veterans with a variety of tools that can reduce the impact of tinnitus on daily functioning.

Thursdays from 1:30 - 3 p.m.

Amy Wadas (215) 823-5800 ext. 20-4363

<https://www.ncrar.research.va.gov/Education>

**Please call the number listed with each program for information regarding registration and class location. Some offerings are walk-in, while others require advance registration.**



# Enhanced VA Options Under the MISSION Act:

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR VETERANS

### This Covers Six Topics

#### 1 HEALTH CARE ELIGIBILITY

VA provides a comprehensive medical benefits package to all Veterans who are enrolled through an annual patient enrollment system that categorizes Veterans based on different priority groups. Eligible Veterans can use VA health care services nationwide, including through mobile health clinics that serve rural areas and via telehealth (care through a phone or computer) in your home or on the go.

#### 2 COMMUNITY CARE ELIGIBILITY

You may be able to receive care from a provider in your local community if you meet specific criteria. Generally, Veterans must be enrolled with VA to receive care, although some Veterans are not required to enroll to receive care. Eligibility further depends upon your individual health care needs or circumstances. It is important to remember that under the Veterans Community Care Program, in most instances VA must authorize your care before you receive it.

Under the MISSION Act, there are six different eligibility criteria for community care. Meeting any one of these criteria for the specific care you need means you are eligible to elect to receive that care either through direct VA care or a community provider in VA's network:

- ▶ The specific care you need is not provided by VA at any facility
- ▶ You reside in a U.S. state (AK, HI, or NH) or territory (Guam, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, or U.S. Virgin Islands) that does not have a full-service VA medical facility
- ▶ "Grandfathered" eligibility based on residence and the 40-mile eligibility criterion from the Choice program
- ▶ The specific care you need is not available within designated access standards
- ▶ You and your referring clinician decide it is in your best medical interest to receive the specific care you need in the community
- ▶ VA has designated the VA medical service line delivering the specific care you need as not providing care that complies with VA's standards for quality



#### 3 URGENT/WALK-IN CARE

VA will offer an urgent/walk-in care benefit for minor injuries and illnesses, such as pink eye or ear infections. To be covered by this benefit, you must be enrolled in the VA health care system and have received care from VA within the 24 months prior to seeking this care to be eligible for this benefit. Eligible Veterans can seek this care from an urgent care facility or walk-in retail health clinic that is part of VA's community provider network, but not all urgent care facilities or walk-in retail health clinics are in VA's network. VA will provide additional information on this benefit.

#### 4 COPAYMENTS AND INSURANCE

Like other health care providers, VA may charge a copayment for health care. The copayment amount may be based on your enrollment priority group, the type of health care service you receive, and your financial situation. If a VA copayment applies, you are responsible for that amount whether your care is furnished directly by VA or through a community provider.

VA may bill your health insurance for medical care, supplies, and prescriptions. As a result of the MISSION Act, VA no longer requires your permission to bill your health insurance carrier for health care related to a sensitive diagnosis. If you would like to submit a request to restrict this process, please contact your local VA facility's privacy officer.

If you have other forms of health care coverage (such as Medicare, Medicaid, TRICARE, Indian Health Service, and tribal health), you can use VA health care benefits along with these plans.

To learn more, contact your local VA medical center or visit [www.missionact.VA.gov](http://www.missionact.VA.gov) and click:

- ▶ VA Health Care and Other Insurance
- ▶ Indian Health Service/Tribal Health Program (IHS/THP)

#### 5 ACCESS STANDARDS AND STANDARDS FOR QUALITY

VA is establishing designated access standards based on the type of care you need, how long you have to wait to receive that care, and your average driving time to receive that care. We are also establishing standards for quality that focus on domains such as timely care, effective care, safe care, and Veteran-centered care. Within each of these domains are specific quality measures. VA is applying both access standards and standards for quality of care it furnishes in VA facilities and is working to ensure quality of care in the community also meets applicable standards. As VA continues to develop and refine these standards, we will provide additional information.

#### 6 COMPLAINT AND APPEALS PROCESS

VA is committed to delivering an excellent care experience every time. We know that concerns arise, and we're here for you. Patient advocates at your facility can assist with almost any problem you may experience. VA has different processes for clinical and non-clinical appeals, and the patient advocate can ensure your concern is handled appropriately.





## TALKING WITH A VETERAN IN CRISIS

You don't have to be an expert to ask if someone is going through a difficult time or having thoughts of suicide. If you notice changes in a Veteran's behavior or moods and you think they might be in crisis, it's time to respond. The simple act of having a conversation can help save a life.

### Here are some ways to approach a conversation with a Veteran who may be suicidal.

First, assess the situation to determine if the Veteran may be in **imminent danger**. Check to see if there are any harmful objects in the area, such as firearms, sharp objects, or lethal drugs. Those at the highest risk for suicide often have a specific suicide plan, the means to carry out the plan, a time set for doing it, and an intention of following through with it.

Asking whether a Veteran is having thoughts of self-harm or suicide may seem extreme, but it is important. Although many people may not show clear signs of intent to harm themselves before doing so, they will likely answer direct questions about their intentions when asked. **Remember, asking if someone is having suicidal thoughts will not give them the idea or increase their risk.**

However, some of those who are at risk may not admit that they plan to attempt suicide. In case the Veteran won't talk about it, be sure to look for warning signs in the box to the right.

#### Safety Issues:

If you believe a Veteran is at high risk and has already harmed himself or herself, you need to call local emergency services at 911.

- **Never** negotiate with someone who has a gun. Get to safety and **call 911**.
- If the Veteran has taken pills or harmed himself or herself in some way, **call 911**.

Veterans who are in emotional distress and are showing warning signs for suicide can be connected to the 24-hour **Veterans Crisis Line**: Call **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, use the **online chat**, or **text to 838255**. Caring, specially trained responders are available to provide free, **confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year**. Responders are available to speak to Veterans and their caregivers, family members, or friends.

### Warning Signs of Imminent Suicide Risk

Acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities that could lead to death, such as driving fast or running red lights — seemingly without thinking

Showing violent behavior such as punching holes in walls, getting into fights, or engaging in self-destructive violence; feeling rage or uncontrolled anger; or seeking revenge

Giving away prized possessions, putting affairs in order, tying up loose ends, and/or making out a will

Seeking access to firearms, pills, or other means of harming oneself

**If you and/or the Veteran are not in imminent danger, start a conversation to help the Veteran open up and to find out how you might be able to help. You can ask questions such as:**

- "When did you first start feeling like this?"
- "Did something happen that made you begin to feel this way?"

**When responding to answers from a Veteran, remember that simple, encouraging feedback goes a long way in showing support and encouraging help-seeking:**

- "You're not alone, even if you feel like you are. I'm here for you, and I want to help you in any way I can."
- "It may not seem possible right now, but the way you're feeling will change."
- "I might not be able to understand exactly what you're going through or how you feel, but I care about you and want to help."

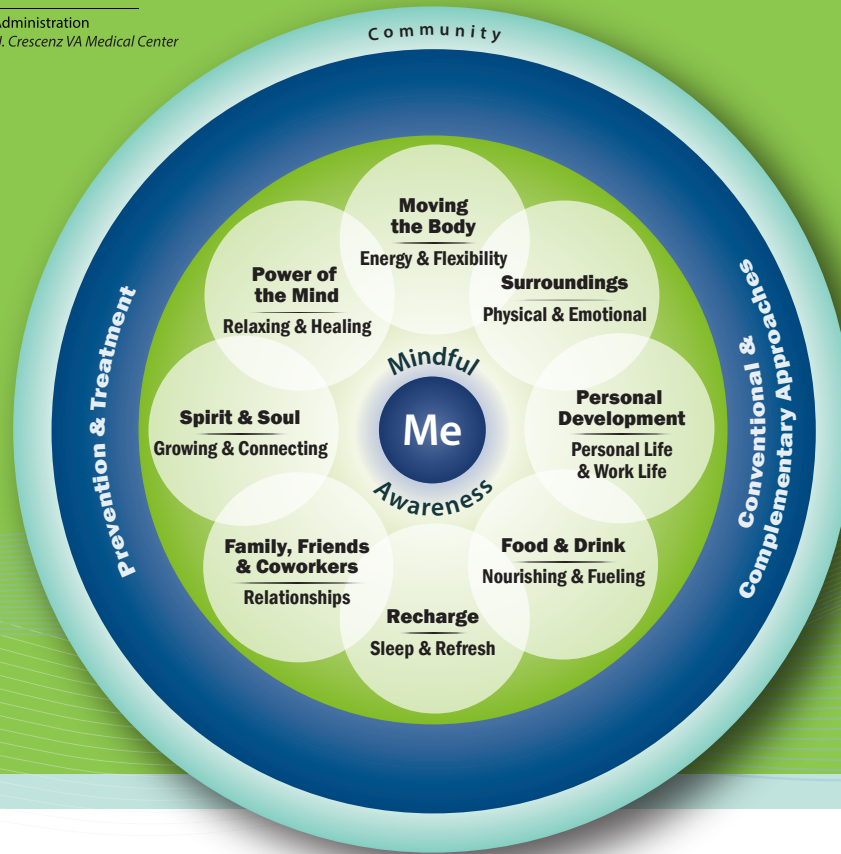
**Even for Veterans who do not appear to be suicidal, it is important to direct them to resources to help them face mental health challenges and more.**

For more information about the Veterans Crisis Line, visit [VeteransCrisisLine.net](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net)

For more information about VA's mental health resources, visit [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov)

For access to more than 400 stories of strength and recovery from Veterans and their family members, visit [MakeTheConnection.net](https://www.maketheconnection.net)





## Introduction to Whole Health Peer Led Group

Come to a 1-time class to learn more about Whole Health, the new model of healthcare at the VA!

### What is this Class?

This class is facilitated by a Veteran and serves as an introduction to the VA Whole Health approach to care. Transitioning Service Members, Veterans, and family members are welcome to attend!

### What is Whole Health Care?

**This approach to care is personalized, proactive, and patient driven. YOU are an active partner and at the center of your healthcare.**

### What can you do?

Commit to your health and well-being and drop into a class to learn more about this approach to healthcare!

### Questions?

Ask your primary care team to see a Veteran Peer Support Specialist.

Starting in September 2019, groups will be held on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of the month from 11a.m. - 12:30 p.m. on the 1st floor, Module A conference room (A 1B107)





# City of Philadelphia's Veterans Day Parade

Preparations for our participation in the City of Philadelphia's Veterans Day parade began nearly one month before one float lined the parade route. Here at Crescenz VAMC, it started with rallying staff and Veteran patients to help decorate four floats for the parade. Veteran Tacquinn Darby, from the grounds team, arranged for his "2 Infamous 4 Da Streets" Auto Club to join the motorcade. Veterans like Patrick Watson, Bunny Johnson, Jonathan Hodges, Raymon Miles, Al Vitiello and more braved the frigid November weather to help decorate floats with meaningful banners and messages highlighting the important work done here. On November 3, after donuts and hot coffee, everyone piled into cars, buses, trucks and fancy automobiles to head off to JFK Boulevard for the 3.5 mile route.

Medical Center Director, Karen Flaherty-Oxler, and her husband, Dr. Steve Oxler, joined in to represent the facility. Walking alongside the float for the entire journey, Ms. Flaherty-Oxler shook hands with Veterans along the parade route, Veterans walking in the parade and spoke to a group of women Veterans, thanking all for their service and telling them about the changes and great work being done at the Crescenz VAMC. From young ROTC high school students to 100+ year old Veterans in wheelchairs and cars, she touched and connected with as many as possible. It was a great event with a huge turnout. We thank all that donated their time and talent, and brought their energy and enthusiasm that warmed, what was truly, a chilly Veterans Day!



# CAMP LEJEUNE HEALTH *and* DISABILITY BENEFITS

Benefits for Camp Lejeune Veterans and family members include health care for 15 conditions listed in the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012.

Veterans can receive disability and health care benefits for eight presumptive disease conditions associated with contaminants in the water at Camp Lejeune.

## HEALTH

Health care and health care funding assistance to Veterans and family members who lived on Camp Lejeune and have one of the covered conditions.

### Qualifying health conditions include:

- Bladder cancer
- Breast cancer
- Esophageal cancer
- Female infertility
- Hepatic steatosis
- Kidney cancer
- Leukemia
- Lung cancer
- Miscarriage
- Multiple myeloma
- Myelodysplastic syndromes
- Neurobehavioral effects
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Renal toxicity
- Scleroderma

## FOR INFORMATION

**VA Health Care 1-877-222-8387**

**VA Benefits 1-800-827-1000**

**CL Family Health Care 1-866-372-1144**

**[www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/)**

**[https://explore.va.gov/  
disability-compensation](https://explore.va.gov/disability-compensation)**

**[www.clfamilymembers.fsc.va.gov/](http://www.clfamilymembers.fsc.va.gov/)**

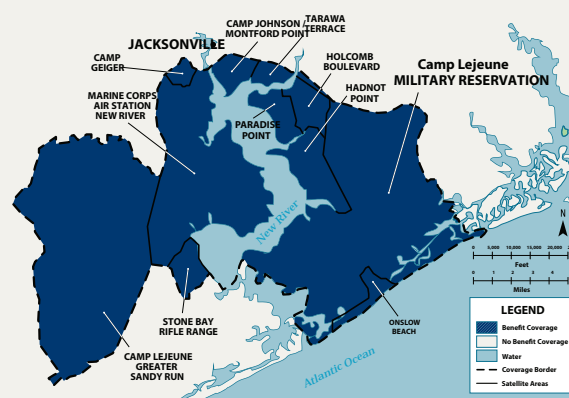
## DISABILITY

The presumption applies to active duty, reserve, and National Guard members exposed to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune who later developed one or more of the following eight conditions:

- Adult leukemia
- Aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes
- Bladder cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Liver cancer
- Multiple myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Parkinson's disease

**Family members are not eligible for disability benefits.**

## CAMP LEJEUNE DISABILITY BENEFIT COVERAGE AREA



## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Stationed at/lived on Camp Lejeune for at least 30 days between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs





**Thinking about making some changes,  
but not sure where to start?**

*Changing our habits can be hard. Come learn how to set yourself up for success by setting realistic goals and accessing support that can help you get there.*

# **Gateway<sup>to</sup> Healthy Living**

**Mondays from 10 -11 a.m.**

**Main hallway of the 2nd floor, room 2B221**



Strive for a healthy weight, Get more from your healthcare, Tobacco cessation, Non-medication strategies for pain, Improve your sleep, Manage stress, and more.



**Choose  VA**

# VETERANS:

**Choose VA and be a part of your health care team by providing current and correct information.**

PLEASE review and update your home address, telephone contact information, insurance information and email address. We need to know how to contact you, where to send your medications, and how to bill your insurance company to provide you with the best care.

**You can update your information in any of these convenient ways:**

- Directly on the kiosks
- By speaking with the clerk at the outpatient clinics
- At the Enrollment/Eligibility desks
- When you call the Call Center (215-823-4014) to schedule an appointment
- Through [My HealthVet](#) follow the instructions on how to send a secure message to request an update to demographic information

Billing private insurance companies for non-service connected care helps VA control costs and that benefits ALL Veterans.

Veterans, when you check in for your appointments, PLEASE review and update your home address, telephone contact information, insurance information and email address.

WHY is this information important? Updated contact information is important so we know how to contact you, where to send your medication, where to send beneficiary travel checks, and for any other reason in case we need to reach out to you.

VA asks you to provide insurance information so we can bill your insurance provider for any care, supplies or medicines we provide to treat non-service connected conditions. By law we do not bill Medicare or Medicaid, but we may bill Medicare supplemental health insurance for covered services.

How does it help me to give VA my health insurance information? Funds received from your private health insurer for non-service connected care will be used to offset part—or all—of your VA copayment.

Also, your private insurer may apply your VA health care charges toward your annual deductible (the amount of money you pay toward your care each year before your insurance starts paying for care).





# Health Disparities and Cultural Competency



The Behavioral Health Service of the CMCVAMC hosted its annual employee retreat and focused on Health Disparities and Cultural Competencies. Keynote speakers Drs. Delane Casiano, M.D. and Karriem Salaam, M.D. discussed considerations for engaging our Veterans of color and reducing mental health stigma. Dr. Delane Casiano and Dr. Karriem Salaam are two of ten founding members of Global Health Psychiatry, LLC, an organization founded by black psychiatrists from all over the country. They work towards decreasing the stigma of mental illness in communities of color through education and community action. The doctors worked with small breakout groups to confront racial stereotypes and had persons of color in the audience address how clinicians can be unconsciously culturally insensitive to diverse populations. The exercise was directed at self-reflection on intersections of diversity and solution-focused dialogue across disciplines and teams. The overall intent is to help close health disparities by developing cultural competencies in servicing all racial and ethnic groups. Staff in attendance acknowledged their need to be more aware and sensitive to cultural differences and were appreciative to be taking these first steps to closing health disparities.





On Wednesday, October 30, 2019 in the south lobby, CMCVAMC held a very important event to launch a new initiative from Executive-in-Charge, Dr. Richard Stone.

This initiative was launched to ensure that everyone that is seen, works, volunteers or visits the medical facility feels safe, welcomed, respected and is free of harassment. Below is the message Medical Center Director, Karen Flaherty-Oxler, delivered on that day. At the end of her message is a link to Dr. Stone's video message to us all. Please read this and make a pledge to do your part!

"Stand Up to Stop Harassment Now! is our public declaration and VA's national campaign to put an end to harassment. VHA leadership has already signed this declaration, and on October 30, 2019, leaders and employees at every VA health care facility joined VHA Leaders in supporting the initiative. VA is committed to a harassment-free health care environment for staff, our Veterans and all visitors to our facilities. Harassment is the act of making unwelcome intrusions upon another and has no place within our health care environment. Harassment is in the eye of the person being harassed, so what one person may consider a friendly conversation, could be met with offense or even fear by another. That's why it is so important to treat everyone with the utmost respect, and to stop harassment wherever and whenever we witness it. We can all step in to stop sexual harassment in any circumstance. If someone does not feel comfortable doing so in the moment, they should feel empowered to report what

they saw to a supervisor, facility leader, VA police officer, or whatever is appropriate as soon as possible. Dr. Stone is adamant that this is a "see something, say something" issue, and leaders must take these reports seriously.

Very simply-- if you witness harassment, intervene if you can. Make sure the victim is safe, and then report the incident as soon as possible. I see daily that our employees are dedicated to our mission of providing Veterans the best care and show respect, kindness and compassion. As a Navy Veteran and your Director, I am asking you to join us as we recommit to our existing high standards of service and commitment to end harassment. We recognize and value all Veterans and want to provide them care in a safe environment where they feel respected not only by our employees, but by their fellow Veteran patients. Likewise, you, our fellow employees, need to feel safe and respected here too. Please use our existing pathways to report harassment.

#### **For Veterans and Visitors:**

Patient Advocates, VA Police, and the Women Veterans Call Center.

#### **For Employees:**

VA Police, Disruptive Behavior Reporting System (DBRS).

Remember, "See Something, Say Something!" Join me today and declare your commitment to ending harassment in our VA!

Dr. Stone's Video Message





The Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical (CMCVAMC) has established the Fiscal Year 2020 Veteran Town Hall schedule to provide the medical center and Veterans an opportunity to share information.

**The CMCVAMC's Veteran Town Hall meeting dates are as follows:**

January 14, 2020 – 11 a.m.	CMCVAMC, 7th Floor LVA Auditorium
February 25, 2020 - 6 p.m.	Gloucester CBOC
March 24, 2020 - 2 p.m.	CMCVAMC, 7th Floor LVA Auditorium
April 21, 2020 - 2 p.m.	Camden CBOC
June 2, 2020 - 6 p.m.	CMCVAMC, 7th Floor LVA Auditorium
July 21, 2020 - 2 p.m.	West Philadelphia CBOC
August 18, 2020 - 6 p.m.	Burlington CBOC
September 22, 2020 - 11 a.m.	CMCVAMC, 7th Floor LVA Auditorium



**VA**

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
*Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center*

**3900 Woodland Avenue  
Philadelphia PA 19104  
(215) 823-5800  
(800) 949-1001**

**Burlington County VA Outpatient Clinic**  
3000 Lincoln Drive East, Suite E  
Marlton, NJ 08053  
(844) 441-5499

**West Philadelphia VA Outpatient Clinic**  
6232 Market Street, Suite 100  
Philadelphia, PA 19139-2922  
(215) 222-7540

**Camden VA Outpatient Clinic**  
300 South Broadway, Suite 103  
Camden, NJ 08104  
(877) 232-5240

**Gloucester County VA Outpatient Clinic**  
211 County House Road  
Sewell, NJ 08080-2525  
(877) 823-5230

**Victor J. Saracini VA Outpatient Clinic**  
433 Caredean Dr.  
Horsham, PA 19044  
(215) 823-6050



[www.philadelphia.va.gov](http://www.philadelphia.va.gov)  
[www.facebook.com/PhiladelphiaVAMC](https://www.facebook.com/PhiladelphiaVAMC)  
[twitter.com/PhiladelphiaVAMC](https://twitter.com/PhiladelphiaVAMC)