

# VOICES OF VISN 6

Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here

## PRESENTS WITHOUT PRESENCE – IT'S 'VIRTUALLY' CHRISTMAS AT THE HAMPTON VA



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By Ben Wocken | HAMPTON VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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HAMPTON, Va — Spending time and spreading Christmas cheer — not COVID — was the idea behind Hampton VA's holiday "gathering." The event was held online last year, prior to the vaccine rollout.

With the in-person event added back this year, most employees were able to participate remotely via the MS Teams conferencing app — and holiday spirit was not in short supply.

With a webcam streaming the action, a limited number of staff celebrated the season enthusiastically together, while virtual viewers interacted using the chat screen.

**TOP PHOTO:** Tracey Jackson, Health Administration Services (L), and Santa Claus (R) interact with staff virtually and in person while judging the poster contest during Hampton VA's holiday party Dec. 17, 2021. **(Photo by Ben Wocken)** Said Santa, "I'm glad that I got to stop by the Hampton VA Medical Center's Christmas and share in the Joy. Santa has been visiting with Veterans for a long time. The ones who provide care to Veterans are at the TOP of the Nice List!"

*(Continued on page 7)*



## MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Happy New Year!

A few weeks ago, while talking with more than 35 stakeholders from our region,

I looked back at our progress since December 2020. Just stopping for that hour to review how far we've come and how much we've accomplished only reaffirmed my gratitude for the opportunity to represent VISN 6 and tell our journey.

This time last year, we were just about to get the Pfizer vaccine; since then, we've administered an astonishing 600,000 vaccine doses of Pfizer, Moderna, and J&J to staff, our Veterans, federal partners, and Veteran's family members and caregivers.

Throughout 2021, our VISN team successfully pivoted, addressing the J&J vaccine, the application of the SAVE LIVES Act, the recall of the Philips CPAP machines, the Delta variant and the summer case surge, the flu shot

(+83,000 across VISN 6), the mandatory vaccine series for VHA employees, and now the booster push for all, to best protect against the winter COVID-19 variant Omicron surge.

We continue to see a surge in COVID cases, mainly due to the greater transmissibility of the Omicron variant and recent holiday gatherings. While data so far suggests that Omicron is less severe than Delta, the higher caseloads are straining VA medical centers across the country. As we continue to navigate these challenges to our system, we will refine our guidance to facilities and all employees to reflect the latest information from the CDC, public, and occupational health experts.

Employee burnout and our staff's overall health and wellbeing continue to be my number one priority and concern, especially as we experience the latest surge. We started responding with force to COVID-19 almost two years ago — and we are still responding, and because of that,

we all must prioritize our mental health and self-care seriously.

On another important note, the Red Cross needs our help, and it is serious. Our nation is experiencing the worst blood shortage in over a decade. The dangerously low blood supply levels have forced some hospitals to defer patients from major surgery, including organ transplants. Your donation of blood is desperately needed. I encourage you to find an opportunity to donate blood at your local VA medical facility or on the Red Cross website [here](#).

Human kindness goes a long way during these times; maybe it is a thank-you, or asking someone how their day is going, or just finding some extra patience when things become frustrating — it all makes a difference. Thank you for your support.

**PAUL S. CREWS**

*MPH, FACHE, VISN 6 Network Director*

## Two VISN 6 Clinicians Honored by the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States

By Steve Wilkins | VISN 6 PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Each year, The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS), a society serving federal health professions, recognizes several medical professionals for their outstanding contributions to federal health care. Congratulations to Dr. LaDonna Thomas, honored as the top nurse in all of federal government, and to Dr. Chad Kessler, who will receive the inaugural national communication award for his creation of the "COVID in 20" program.

AMSUS, one of the most revered national health forums is a non-profit member-based educational and professional development society serving federal health professions, such as DOD, VA, HHS, DHS, and other interagency.



**Dr. LaDonna Thomas**

Dr. Thomas is a Nurse Practitioner at the Durham VA Health Care System where she serves Veterans directly through work in Care in The Community and serves fellow Nurse Practitioners in her role as

Lead Nurse Practitioner for the DVAHCS. Dr. Thomas holds a faculty appointment at Duke University School of Nursing and is a major contributor to the annual DVAHCS-Duke School of Nursing Annual Advanced Practice Provider Symposium. Dr. Thomas led the DVAHCS in its transition to full practice authority (FPA), working directly with the state of NC Board of Nursing.

She has helped multiple other facilities across the VISN and the country similarly move to FPA. Elected by nurses across the state of North Carolina, Dr. Thomas now serves as the Advanced Practice Nurse representative on the NC Board of Nursing.



**Dr. Chad Kessler**

Dr. Kessler is Executive Director of Emergency Medicine for the Veterans Health Administration, and he continues to directly serve Veterans by maintaining a primary care clinic in Durham, chairs the OIF/OEF/OND Steering Committee, and is a Professor at Duke University

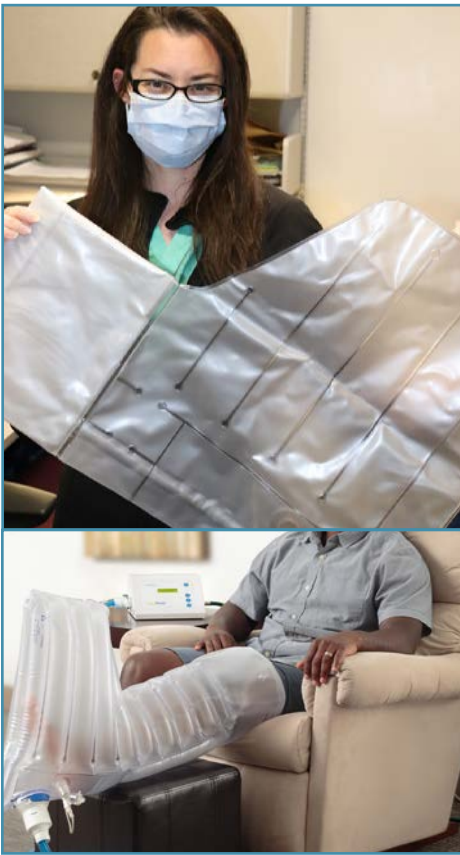
School of Medicine. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Kessler filled a need across the VA when he began a regular blog program, "COVID in 20." "COVID in 20" is a video broadcast that triumphs clinical programs and leaders of all walks of life from across the VA — a first of its kind that reaches, educates, and encourages thousands of employees across the VA.

Both Kessler and Thomas have created positive change at personal, healthcare system, and national levels for one great cause — to serve Veterans with the highest quality of care. VISN 6 leadership congratulates you both for recognition of your efforts. They will receive their awards February 10 during the AMSUS Annual Meeting.

### About The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS), The Society of Federal Health Professionals:

Founded in 1891 and Chartered by Congress in 1903, The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS), The Society of Federal Health Professionals, is a non-profit, member-based association providing education and professional development benefits to support federal health professionals and their missions at the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security, and our industry partners and advocates for advancing health for all.





# VA Doctor Publishes Research Highlighting Diabetic Wound Care

By Rosaire Bushey

SALEM VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

A paper published in the October edition of the academic journal *Advances in Wound Care* highlights an ongoing study into diabetic wound care that is being championed by VA providers such as Dr. Aliza Lee, Podiatry Attending at the Salem VA Health Care System in Virginia. Working with Dr. Matthew Garoufalos from the Jessie Brown VAMC in Chicago, Ill., the research team's findings show growing evidence for Topical Wound Oxygen, or TWO<sub>2</sub>, therapy.

The TWO<sub>2</sub> therapy uses a plastic sleeve to encase the affected limb and floods the area with oxygen. Early studies with the therapy have shown a markedly improved healthcare outcome as evidenced by a 2018 paper by Lee and her team that appeared in the magazine, *Diabetes*. The current article is featured in [Advances in Wound Care](#) and is part of a Salem Research Institute-funded study.

For the latest study, 202 patients suffering from Diabetic Foot Ulcers (DFU) had their records screened to determine whether they were involved with hospitalization and/or amputation within 12 months of their initial wound documentation. With this baseline information in hand, the group was divided so that 91

patients were treated with TWO<sub>2</sub> and 111 were treated with other, appropriate therapies.

"The concept of TWO<sub>2</sub> therapy has been around for about a decade," Lee said. "An earlier study looked at enrolled patients with specific wound limitations and watched them for 12 weeks. This study is a Real-World Evidence (RWE) study that looks at the charts of a wider variety of patients looking for outcomes."

Of the 91 patients treated with TWO<sub>2</sub> therapy, there was an 88% reduction in hospitalization and a 71% reduction in amputations over a 12-month period compared to those who did not have the TWO<sub>2</sub> therapy. "140 people, 70 with the therapy and 70 without, showed 82% fewer hospitalizations and 73% fewer amputations over 12 months," she said.

A mathematical regression of the data showed that patients who don't get the TWO<sub>2</sub> therapy are 8.9 times more likely to be hospitalized, and 4.9 times more likely to have an amputation than Veterans with DFU who do get the therapy.

"The five-year mortality rate after limb amputation is 68%," Lee said. "That's second only to lung cancer, which has an 86% mortality rate after five years. Saving limbs is saving lives and this technology helps us get these patients into remission, reducing amputations and hospitalizations."

The [Virginia State University Alumni Association](#) Roanoke Chapter presented the Homeless Program a donation of \$1,050 for the purchase of items needed by area homeless Veterans. The VSUAA, under the direction of Darnell Wood, President, discussed barriers faced by homeless Veterans, such as lack of resources including household items for the newly housed, as well as comfort or warm-weather items to sustain Veterans during the winter months. Rev. Dr. William 'Bill' Lee, who retired from the Salem VA as a Chaplain, helped lead the donation initiative.



The Salem Research Institute was awarded a \$25,000 [New York Life Insurance Company](#) Foundation Love Takes Action Award Sept. 30. The grant will support Veteran Research and Educational activities performed at the Salem VA Health Care System. During the COVID-19 pandemic, SRI worked with Salem VA HCS to ensure Veterans enrolled in research studies continued to receive the benefits of those studies.

The Love Takes Action Award provides \$25,000 to 20 local nonprofit organizations. Organizations are nominated by New York Life agents and employees. Ten awards were given in the COVID-19 Response category and 10 in the Social Justice category. In the photo below, from left: Harvey Allison, Managing Partner, New York Life, Christopher Angiletta, New York Life Agent, Frances Hickman, Director, Salem Research Institute, and Adam Dyer, Partner, New York Life.

**FROM LEFT:** Left: Harvey Allison, Managing Partner, New York Life, Christopher Angiletta, New York Life Agent, Frances Hickman, Director, Salem Research Institute, and Adam Dyer, Partner, New York Life.

## Central Virginia Teletherapy Services - 'The VA saved my life'

By Megan Kon

CVHCS RICHMOND VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Virtual health care can offer patients a sense of comfort while never leaving home. During the pandemic, these virtual options have grown in popularity, too. At the Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS), a wide range of virtual services are available to address the unique needs of Veterans.

Andrew Morehouse participates in music therapy using telehealth technology, such as

[VA Video Connect](#) (VVC). After having multiple sessions, he finds the telehealth aspect makes him feel more at ease.

"It is easier for me," Morehouse said. "I am more comfortable in my own setting."

VA began adopting telehealth technology in the 1960s. Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, VA's use of [Telehealth Services](#) became common practice. Since the pandemic started, its use has increased by [1,200%](#).

VVC links VA health care providers

to Veterans by using a computer, tablet, or smartphone with an email address and an Internet connection.

"VVC can build stronger connections with patients, helping them reach their goals and objectives with minimal interruptions," said Hope Kumme, a board-certified neurologic music therapist. She quickly adapted to the technology and has produced more virtual sessions than most others at CVHCS.

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## Central Virginia Teletherapy Services - 'The VA saved my life'

Veterans with mental illness, including post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, may be referred to Kumme. She says patients can learn new strategies of coping through her teletherapy sessions thanks to a safe, stress-free and positive therapeutic experience.

"With telehealth, I treat Veterans as if they are right here with me," Kumme said.

Morehouse says music therapy helped him look forward to the future. He has written a song about his service overseas. Specifically, the song is about a local woman he locked eyes with during an attack in Iraq in 2004.

Written from the perspective of the woman, the lyrics state, "My son was standing next to me, not the place for us to be. Please won't you hear my plea; we just want you to leave."

### The Benefit of Music Therapy >>>>>

Music therapy is a component of CVHCS's rehabilitation services, which works to connect Veterans with services to address their emotional, mental, physical and spiritual needs. The Veteran's primary care provider can place a consult for this service.

Veterans have access to individualized or group music therapy services. Music therapy is also offered as part of our Veteran's Integrative Pain center, which is a program for Veterans battling chronic pain. For further information regarding [music therapy](#), please contact your physician or Hope Kumme at 804-675-5000 ext. 6100.



Andrew Morehouse, an Army Veteran who receives care at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System, practices a song with Hope Kumme, a board-certified neurologic music therapist, during a recent telehealth session. Since the pandemic began, Kumme increased virtual care visits significantly. (Photo courtesy of Hope Kumme.)

### Pain Relief Is Possible Through Virtual Care

Richard Kanney said he never liked taking medicine. So, he naturally didn't think to seek services at a hospital. After talking with a friend, Kanney reluctantly sought services through the Virtual Veterans Integrative Pain Center at CVHCS. He learned about the practice of mindfulness. Mindful meditation can help with pain, sleep, and stress.

"The Army almost killed me; the VA saved my life," said Richard Kanney. "I knew I needed to go to the VA for help, but I didn't know I had PTSD."

Other services in the Virtual Veterans Integrative Pain center include yoga, breath and movement training, sleep treatment, acupressure, and anti-inflammatory diet education.

"There are so many things that I did not know I had [available to me]," Kanney said. "I've learned so much from the VA."

For more information, visit:

<https://connectedcare.va.gov/>

Richard Kanney, an Army Veteran, explored the Virtual Veterans Integrative Pain Clinic to relieve his pain symptoms. In 2019, he completed the Ironman Marathon. (Photo courtesy of Richard Kanney.)



**Join our team**  
visit our job fair



**JAN. 19, 2022 | 10 A.M. - 3 P.M.**  
**NCWORKS CAREER CENTER ASHEVILLE**  
48 Grove Street  
Asheville, North Carolina, 28801  
Phone: 828-251-6200

## Now Hiring: WNC VA Health Care System Partners with NCWorks to Host VA Job fair

By Vance Janes

WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

ASHEVILLE, NC – The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System is looking for some new employees.

The Health Care System has partnered with NC Works – the state's workforce development center – to host a job fair Jan. 19, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the NCWorks Career Center in Asheville.

**THE ADDRESS FOR THE JOB FAIR IS:**  
**NCWorks Career Center Asheville**  
**48 Grove Street**  
**Asheville, North Carolina, 28801**  
**Phone: 828-251-6200**

The Health Care System is encouraging both veterans and non-veterans to apply, and it will be hiring applicants for the following positions:

- Registered Nurses
- Licensed Practical Nurses
- Nursing Assistants
- Emergency Medical Technicians
- Medical Support Assistants
- Advanced Medical Support Assistants
- Food Service Workers
- Housekeeping Aides
- Intermediate Care Technicians (former Military Corpsmen/Medics)
- Police Officers

Additionally, the Veterans Canteen Service will be hiring Food Service Workers and Retail Salesclerks.

Representatives from the Health Care System will be on hand to answer questions and assist applicants with the application process.

Working with the VA offers a strong starting salary based on education, training, and experience as well as periodic pay raises that address inflation and local market changes.

Employment also includes comprehensive benefits including insurance, paid leave, flexible savings accounts and more. There are plenty of opportunities for advancement as well as a Federal Retirement Plan.



# How a Request for Crackers Shaped Salisbury VA Health Care System's Response to Stress During the Pandemic

By Todd Goodman | SALISBURY VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS

When the COVID pandemic first hit, a combat zone memory and a request for crackers led to a stress control model that Salisbury VA Health Care System has seen become an inspiration to other facilities.

It began when Army Veteran Dr. Marc Cooper, Mental Health Service chief at Salisbury VA, was sitting in a COVID planning meeting to discuss the increased capacity needed to handle an influx of patients.

"We were talking about different supplies that needed to be purchased when the chief of surgery asked if his staff could get crackers," said Cooper. "He said it would be nice to have crackers for the staff to give them some sort of nourishment if they are working double shifts."

Cooper had been envisioning beds in the hallways and being overrun with COVID patients, but that statement caused him to reflect on his military experience.

"It dawned on me that this was very similar to a combat zone," he said. "This would be a great opportunity to essentially create the equivalent of a combat and operational stress control service — minus the combat."

He'd participated in various planning meetings but when the surgical chief made that comment, it gave Cooper a new perspective.

"It brought in the human element of how this was going to affect staff at a personal level," he said. "It sunk in that it's really going to put a strain on them. What can we do to support their stress levels?"

So, Cooper put together a team comprising staff from Mental Health, Social Work, Research, Employee Occupational Health, Whole Health and Chaplain Service. Perhaps the most impactful aspect of Operational Stress Control (OSC) was the ability to communicate information quickly from the frontlines to the highest levels of leadership.

"During the height of the pandemic, we did surveys weekly and collected real time data — sort of a temperature check," said Dr. Christina Vair, psychologist and Whole Health Director. "Leadership was able to act quickly so people felt they were being heard and their concerns met."

Salisbury VA Director Joseph Vaughn met with OSC members often during the pandemic to get a sense of staff needs and particular areas that needed his attention.

"It was eye opening for sure," said Vaughn. "As a director, you're always putting out fires so to speak, and OSC certainly informed me of the areas with the most need."

Staff experiencing stress could speak with trained staff and also were provided with opportunities to learn calming and relaxation techniques.

"We had to come up with ways to give people an opportunity to pause, whether that was a 15-minute mindfulness practice or giving them stress management resources," said Vair. "And for the people who weren't able to step away, it was important to show gratitude and appreciation so they still felt they were being recognized for their efforts."



Dr. Christina Vair, psychologist and Whole Health Director, and Dr. Marc Cooper, Mental Health Service chief at Salisbury VA, conduct rounds as part of Operational Stress Control. These rounds are a great way for senior leaders to gauge staff stress levels.

Salisbury VA Health Care System was the first facility in its network to implement this type of OSC model. It also was recognized by VA Secretary Denis McDonough during a recent visit.

Cooper, who does rounding in different service areas, has seen the effect of checking in with the workforce.

"Staff really valued being asked how they were doing," said Cooper. "Even this long into the pandemic, we continue to see staff members showing appreciation because they're being checked on."

Since April 2020, OSC has received more than 4,660 individual survey responses, reached 1,007 employees in person, hosted 125 leadership video conferences, and assisted 13 departments with grief and morale-related challenges.

"It's not easy working in health care even when there isn't a pandemic," said Vair. "It isn't just pandemic-related stress — though that has been the fuel on the fire. When we stood up OSC, we did it with the intent of creating something that would be sustainable. The ideals of OSC are critical to good organizational health."

## Share Your Health, Roll Up Your Sleeve

Join VA to help fight the COVID-19 blood shortage.



#RollUpYourSleeveVA





# Central Virginia Health Care System's Response to Pandemic Stress

By David Hodge | CVHCS RICHMOND VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS



Over the past few weeks, a new employee engagement program has caught the attention of staff at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS).

The program, named Strategic Partnerships (SP), started in early September and offers help to staff who experience increased strain or interpersonal concerns within their workgroups.

"After the first few workgroups found Strategic Partnerships beneficial, word-of-mouth advertising has Dr. Boone partnering with a workgroup nearly every day," said Dr. Tabitha Sierra, chief of the Engagement and Experience Office at CVHCS. "No marketing or advertising has been needed."

At the center of SP is Dr. Dominique Boone, an organizational health psychologist who has worked at the facility for the past four years.

"These presentations are leveraging the power of respectful and authentic conversations in a team where there is a difference of perspective" Boone explained. "All topics are meaningful, worthwhile and help the team perform at its best."

According to Boone, the program seeks to enhance workgroup performance through team building exercises based on two main strategies: psychological safety and conflict resolution.

Boone has offered 20 interactive seminars to 12 workgroups in the facility, which has impacted more than 250 employees.

## SP IN PRACTICE

During the pandemic, health care workers have faced several hardships, including increased workload, staffing shortages in certain occupations, and stress due to layers of COVID precautions over the past 20-plus months. Boone believes these are some of the

Dr. Dominique Boone has served as an organizational health psychologist at Central Virginia VA Health Care System for the past four years. Currently, she works in the Engagement and Experience Office, where she manages several special programs. One of her latest ventures is the Strategic Partnerships program, which works with teams in the hospital who may be experiencing increased strain or interpersonal concerns within their workgroups. (Photo by David Hodge)

factors that can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue among employees.

In one example, a new employee joined a team at the hospital. Over the course of weeks, it became apparent the new staff member wasn't fitting in with the existing workgroup. When the situation began to have a negative impact on the team they turned to Boone. Through the SP sessions, both sides were able to voice their concerns to each other, and they acknowledged their differences.

By the end, the language, tone, and demeanor between them all had changed to be more respectful of each other, said Boone.

"There's been so many times where people are able to have a great conversation," Boone said. "Ultimately, there may not be a fix for the problem, but they can find a respectful way forward, which is important."

## THE PROCESS

Every workgroup Boone helps is comprised of a team leader, which is most often the team's supervisor, and a number of staff who make up the team members. Through a virtual meeting platform, Boone leads the group through two interactive sessions. There is at least one month between the two sessions to allow the workgroup the opportunity to use the new information and lessons learned.

The participants are asked to answer a series of questions prior to starting the program. Everyone remains anonymous during the process, and the responses allow Boone to determine the level of psychological safety in the group. She then uses this information to tailor the program to meet any specific needs.

"The response to the new program has been phenomenal," Boone said.

According to Boone, the ideal workgroup size is about one dozen people, although she has worked with anywhere between six and 25 participants.

## THE FUTURE

Boone said she is already looking ahead to Phase II of this initiative. Current plans include having a dedicated transformational coach to check in periodically with the workgroups for extended follow-up, and have a team-building expert work to keep workgroups engaged.

Other items in the works to strengthen this program: quarterly presentations to help team leaders, open office hours for consultations, and informational videos that address frequently asked questions.

"All of these additions are meant to help continue the work we have started," Boone stated.

## ABOUT CVHCS

Since 1944, our primary mission has been to care for Veterans and their caregivers. As Virginia's largest Veteran's hospital network, CVHCS delivers high-quality health care using state-of-the-art-technology to our Nation's Heroes, every day. We are honored to offer health care services at our main hospital in south Richmond, or at one of our five community clinics in Charlottesville, Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania County, Emporia and Henrico. For more information, or to register for VA health care services, please visit [richmond.va.gov](http://richmond.va.gov).





CONTINUED FROM COVER

## Presents Without Presence – It’s ‘Virtually’ Christmas at the Hampton VA

By Ben Wocken | HAMPTON VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

### Typing a List

Combining a red hat, a candy-cane-adorned shirt and colorful lights for a necklace, Shawn Alexander, Chief of Staff, and his score-keeping “Helper Elf” Jameela Dixie Williams, hosted one of the holiday-themed games, asking outlying community clinics and offices Christmas-based trivia questions. The first person to correctly type the answer into the group chat bar won a gift from under the tree. The hybrid format worked well, although delivery of the winners’ presents presented a logistical hurdle best solved by ...

### The Big Man in the Red Suit

Making an exciting guest appearance, Santa Claus added much joy to the festivities with his larger-than-life presence. Claus joined in singing holiday carols with the Hampton VA’s house band, judging the poster contest — won by Nutrition and Food Services — giving gifts and dancing with, and for, joyful staff.



Tracey Jackson, Health Administration Services (L), and Santa Claus (R) interact with staff virtually and in person while judging the poster contest during Hampton VA’s holiday party Dec. 17, 2021. (Photo by Ben Wocken)

Said Santa, “I’m glad that I got to stop by the Hampton VA Medical Center’s Christmas and share in the Joy. Santa has been visiting with Veterans for a long time. The ones who provide care to Veterans are at the TOP of the Nice List!”

“Last year we couldn’t get together to celebrate the birth of Christ, so today feels extra special,” said Santa’s spokesperson Chaplain Thomas “Gil” Mitchell. “Giving gifts is a great reminder of the gifts of freedom, peace and wholeness that the Christ Child brings. The baby born on Christmas is called Immanuel (God with Us), and He was sent on a rescue mission for humanity. Our Veterans know about the sacrifices needed to rescue and keep freedom’s flame lit in a ‘naughty list’ world.”

Mitchell sees synchronicity between the Reason for the Season and the VA mission, “To care for [those] who shall have borne the battle,” saying, “Jesus and our healthcare providers are big in the healing business. Whether it’s the soul or the body, both render help giving hope to the hurting. It’s a great time of year — especially if you’re on the Nice List!” Santa added a few hearty “Ho! Ho! Hos!” to emphasize the good Chaplain’s point.

### Masked and Merry

“Although we conducted a fully virtual celebration in 2020, having employees and entertainers perform in person gave us a certain sense of normalcy,” said event organizer and emcee John Rogers, Public Affairs. “We wanted to involve everybody and designed our events, such as the Ugly Sweater Contest and Name That Tune around a hybrid format.” Rogers also booked the Hampton VA House

PHOTO ABOVE: Singing ‘The 12 Days of Christmas’ together, Hampton VA staff were joined online by colleagues using the Teams conferencing app during Hampton’s hybrid holiday party Dec. 17, 2021. (Photo by Ben Wocken)



Partying while practicing public health prevention, staff celebrate the season dancing to DJ Chris “Fatback” Justice’s DJing during Hampton VA’s holiday party Dec. 17, 2021. (Photo by Ben Wocken)

Band and singing sensation Latearius Curry, from Canteen Services, to add additional energy and cheer. The musicians and DJ did not disappoint, indicated by the dance moves and happy .gif and emoji images Hampton VA employees shared in the computer chat, projected onto the front wall for all to see.



TOP PHOTO: Latearius Curry (middle) sings Christmas carols with members of the Hampton VA House Band during the staff holiday party Dec. 17, 2021. (Photo by Ben Wocken)

Whether sending Happy Holiday emojis or swinging masked with the seasonal music, Hampton VA shared this season of togetherness socially distanced and virtually together.

# Distributing Gifts Uplifts Both Veterans and Staff at Salisbury VAMC

By Todd Goodman | SALISBURY VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

Santa and his elves recently distributed Christmas gifts to the residents of the Community Living Center (CLC) at the Salisbury VA Medical Center. Veterans quickly got into the holiday spirit as presents were delivered.

Recreation Therapist Brittany Plummer, who was one of the elves, rode the CLC hallways in a makeshift sleigh with loads of gift bags donated by local agencies.

“We came up with the idea and a generous donor brought us a cardboard Christmas sleigh,” said Plummer. “We taped it onto one of our scooters and off we went.”

This tradition truly is a team effort, with CLC staff, social workers, recreation therapists and Voluntary Service all having a hand in making it a success.

“Due to COVID, the agencies that put the gift bags together could not distribute them in person, but we still tried to make it exciting for our Veterans,” said Plummer.

CLC staff got as much out of the gift giving as the Veterans.

“We have great passion for our Veterans, especially around the holidays,” said Plummer. “Getting to see the Veterans smile as Santa came around the corner saying ‘ho, ho, ho’ and us being able to give them a gift ... it just meant the world to us.”

The past two years have been especially challenging for CLC Veterans due to COVID. Being able to do small things that make a Veteran smile is something CLC staff prioritizes.



Santa and Salisbury VA staff recently distributed gifts to inpatient Veterans at the Community Living Center. This annual event brightens the spirit of both Veterans and staff alike.

“These types of activities are extremely important to our Veterans and their quality of life,” said Lauren Crofts, chief nurse of Geriatric and Extended Care. “Being able to do this makes it feel more like a normal time. Our Veterans really look forward to these events.”

For Plummer, who as a recreation therapist is always looking for ways to interact with CLC Veterans, an activity like this touches her on a personal level.

“I just try to do what I would hope someone would do for my family if they were here under these circumstances,” she said. “We try to think outside the box and give them something to look forward to over the holidays. Being able to do small gestures like this makes my job even more wonderful than it already is.”

Salisbury VA Health Care System Director Joseph Vaughn recognizes the importance of interacting with Veteran inpatients and praised CLC staff for keeping them engaged.

“I can’t say enough about the work of all involved, who plan and coordinate events to connect with our CLC residents,” he said. “They do so much work behind the scenes to try and ensure our Veterans have the best experience possible. These past two years have been a challenge, but our CLC staff always tries to make our Veterans feel special.”

## The Joel Fund Invites Veterans to Operation ART Spring Session, Jan. 10-Feb. 18

Headquartered in Wake Forest, N.C., the Joel Fund is offering Central North Carolina Veterans and family members the opportunity to pursue artistic passions through Operation ART, a community therapeutic arts program aiming to provide them an expressive outlet for emotional wellbeing. The organization is connecting Veterans and their families with peers in their community through the power of art. The program has welcomed more than 200 Veterans so far, and the number is growing.

Operation ART is supported in part by the N.C. Arts Council, a division of the Department of Natural & Cultural Resources. ([www.NCArts.org](http://www.NCArts.org))

Classes are offered in virtual photography, printmaking, woodworking, metalworking, clay, and writing.

Brooke Dickhart started The Joel Fund in memory of her dad, Joe Silva, who was a Navy SEAL for almost 20 years, then passed away in 2014, after bouts with PTSD, substance abuse and depression. What started out as a mission to connect Veterans to non-traditional services has grown into a solid community of support for Veterans and their families. Since inception, the organization has served more than 744 Veterans. This community of support includes a collaboration with organizations that provide [non-traditional services](#) for Veterans and their families, [art classes](#), and [local events to encourage Veterans](#) to be active in their community.

For more information, call (919) 247-9333 or visit the website at [OPERATION A.R.T. CLASSES - The Joel Fund](#)





## Drinking alcohol may be enjoyable and can cause problems like:



Saying/doing things you wouldn't while sober



Problems driving, crashes, other accidents



Problems thinking/remembering



Unsafe interactions with prescribed medications

If you choose to drink alcohol, drink moderately.

### Recommended limits:

<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>OVER 64</b>
<b>1 DRINK A DAY</b>	<b>2 DRINKS A DAY</b>	<b>1 DRINK A DAY</b>
and no more than <b>7 DRINKS PER WEEK</b>	and no more than <b>14 DRINKS PER WEEK</b>	and no more than <b>7 DRINKS PER WEEK</b>

**Avoid heavy drinking:**

**4 OR MORE DRINKS on 1 occasion for WOMEN** (& everyone over age 64)

**5 OR MORE DRINKS on 1 occasion for MEN**

A drink is equal to:

- 12 oz. beer (5% alcohol)
- 5 oz. glass of wine
- 1 1/2 oz. spirits (80 proof)

# Limit Alcohol - January Monthly Topic - Veteran Resources

By Vance Janes | WNC VA HEALTH CARE PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

January marks the start of a new year and an opportunity to think about alcohol use. The [National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention](#) is using January to bring attention to the topic of [Limiting Alcohol](#) use with Veterans.

Due to the mental and emotional strain of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, some may turn to alcohol to escape stress. However, unhealthy drinking can cause new problems. Moderation is key for those who drink alcohol. The recommended limit for men is no more than two drinks each day and no more than 14 drinks per week. The recommended limit for women and all people over age 64 is no more than one drink each day and no more than seven drinks per week.

If you choose to drink alcohol, drink in moderation. Women and everyone over age 64 should drink no more than 1 drink per day (and not more than 7 drinks per week). Men aged 64 and under should drink no more than 2 drinks per day (and not more than 14 drinks per week). One drink is equivalent to:

- 12 oz. regular beer, usually about 5% alcohol or
- 8-9 oz. malt liquor, or
- 5 oz. table wine (12%), or
- 1.5 oz. 80-proof hard liquor

Thinking about your drinking? Considering a change? VA is here to help. [Click here](#) to learn more and start making changes.

## WNC VA Health Care System Appoints Deputy Chief of Staff

By Vance Janes

WNC VA HEALTH CARE PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System has a new Deputy Chief of Staff.

Dr. Douglas Huntley, who has been serving as the Acting Deputy Chief of Staff since June 2021, was permanently appointed to the position Jan. 2.

He has served the Health Care System as the Assistant Chief of Surgical Service, Section Chief of General Surgery, ACOS for Academic Affiliations and as a General Surgeon at Charles George VA Medical Center (CGVAMC) in Asheville.

The Health Care System is composed of CGVAMC, and Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) in Hickory, Franklin and Rutherford County, N.C.

“I am honored and consider it a privilege to serve our Veterans at the Asheville VA,” Huntley said. “It is such a highly regarded facility, and one that I feel an enormous amount of commitment to. I look forward to serving in this position for many years to come.”

Huntley was in private practice in Hendersonville N.C. for about 15 years before coming to the VA. He started working at the Health Care System in 2011 as a Staff Surgeon.

“Working with the VA has been a blessed time in my life,” Huntley said. “It really has.”



Dr. Douglas Huntley took on the role of deputy chief of staff Jan. 2. Prior to that he has served as the acting deputy chief of staff since June 2021.

**Editor's note:** Dr. Huntley is an Army Veteran and received his Medical Doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

# VA Strengthens Care for Veterans Impacted by Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs recently initiated a pilot program to improve services for Veterans who have experienced or are experiencing [intimate partner violence](#) or sexual assault.

The two-year initiative focuses on strengthening community partnerships, training for VA staff and community partners, identifying effective clinical interventions and providing outreach to underserved populations.

“Approximately one in three women and one in four men in the general population report experiencing intimate partner violence,” said VA Management and Social Work Executive Director Jill Debord. “[Research](#) by VA’s National Center for post-traumatic stress disorder shows Veterans may be disproportionately impacted by IPV.”

The pilot program stems from the [Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, Title 5 of the Deborah Sampson Act](#). This initiative allows opportunity to better understand and address intimate partner violence and sexual assault among the Veteran population.

Veterans who have experienced or are experiencing IPV are encouraged to contact an [Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program Coordinator](#) at the nearest VA medical center or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233 or 800-787-3224 (TTY).

## The following VAMCs are participating:

- [VA Finger Lakes Healthcare System](#) in Bath and Canandaigua, N.Y.
- [North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System](#) in Gainesville and Lake City, Fla.
- [Tennessee Valley Healthcare System](#) in Nashville and Murfreesboro, Tenn.
- [Jesse Brown VA Medical Center](#) in Chicago, Ill.
- [Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System](#) in Little Rock, Ark.
- [VA Salt Lake City Health Care System](#) in Salt Lake City, Utah.
- [Cheyenne VA Medical Center](#) in Cheyenne, Wyo.
- [Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center](#) in Walla Walla, Wash.
- [VA Pacific Islands Health Care System](#) in Honolulu, Hawaii.
- [Southern Arizona VA Health Care System](#) in Tucson, Ariz.
- For more information about available supportive services, visit [VA’s Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program](#) or [VA’s Military Sexual Trauma Program](#).

# 2021 Under Secretary for Health’s Robert L. Jesse Award Recognizes VA Boundary-Breaking Innovations



**Jesse Family  
FOUNDATION**

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs honored three innovative health care practices and their creators late October with the [Robert L. Jesse Award for Excellence in Innovation](#).

In less than two months, these trailblazing innovations are already impacting Veteran lives of VA’s work in reproductive care, IT and 3D printing showcasing the department as a leader in health care.

“Innovation is how we truly break boundaries and forge a healthier future for all Veterans,” said Veterans Health Administration Deputy Under Secretary for Health for the Office of Discovery Dr. Carolyn Clancy. “The Robert L. Jesse Award for Excellence in Innovation winners are shining examples of how VA is fulfilling [Secretary Denis McDonough’s priority of providing all Veterans with timely, world-class care](#).”

The award gives distinction to VA employees who have demonstrated brilliance enabling the discovery and spread of health care innovation that exceeds expectations, restores hope and builds trust within VA.

This year’s awards are for the following categories:

## Clinical, for innovations involving clinical care efforts.

- **PREPARE** – Perinatal Reproductive Education Planning and Resources is an internal, one stop shop for perinatal and postnatal Veterans and their families. The program consists of a multidisciplinary medical team that provides individual and family support to help Veteran families transition in a healthy way — both physically and mentally — after the birth or loss of a child. Program feedback has been positive and highly valued by the more than 100 Veterans and their families who have used it. As a result, VA is looking to expand.

## Non-Clinical, for IT and other non-care related innovations.

- **ACCESS TO CARE** – The VA Chief Technology Officer has digitized the process of validating military experience and enabled Veterans to complete clinical screenings from any connected device through an effort revolutionizing Veterans’ ease of access to care. Implementation of this initiative has allowed patients to report their symptoms or complete standardized screenings in advance of their medical appointments, therefore facilitating an expedited and more efficient visit for both the Veteran and provider.

## Team, for innovations created by a group or organization within VA.

- **3D INNOVATION** – The 3D Innovation Center at the Ralph H. Johnson Health Care System in Charleston, S.C., is at the forefront of using 3D printing to develop customized care for Veterans. The center worked alongside local audiologists to develop the [Gio Stent](#), a medical device uniquely created for a specific Veteran’s care and VHA’s first 3D-printed device to receive compassionate use approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The winners and finalists for the Robert L. Jesse Award for Excellence in Innovation were selected by a committee composed of leadership from across VHA. Learn more about the [creators of these innovations](#) and [VA innovations](#) as a whole.



# VA Seeks Feedback to Guide New Copayment Waiver Program for Veterans at Risk for Suicide

WASHINGTON — To encourage outpatient mental health care and reduce any potential barriers associated with seeking it, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is proposing to eliminate copayment requirements for outpatient mental health visits and reduce the copayments for medications dispensed to Veterans who are identified as high risk for suicide by a VA clinician.

VA [published a notice](#) in the Federal Register Jan. 5 to solicit public feedback to guide implementation of the new VA program modifying copayments for Veterans at risk of suicide.

“Research shows increased frequency of outpatient mental health encounters for high-risk Veterans reduces their risk of suicide,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Through these efforts, VA will continue to address this national public health crisis by further eliminating financial burdens on Veterans which may negatively influence their engagement in mental health treatment and their critical medication availability.”

Currently, there is no exemption from outpatient care copayments for Veterans who are at risk for suicide, and such Veterans have to pay a \$15.00 or \$50.00 copayment for each outpatient visit, depending on whether the visit qualifies as primary care or specialty care.

In addition, to decrease the risk of

overdose on prescribed medications, prescription-based lethal means safety programs often focus on limiting the supply of medications that may, intentionally or unintentionally, contribute to an overdose. An example of this would be to prescribe a seven-day supply of medication with four refills rather than a prescribing one 30-day supply of the medication.


This proposed rule would reduce the financial burden of multiple co-payments associated with both increased outpatient visits as well as more frequent, but limited supply of prescribed medications.

The public notice requests feedback at the [Federal Register](#). The public comment period ends March 7.

More information on lethal means safety and safe medication storage can be found at [Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety - REACH \(va.gov\)](#).

If you're a Veteran having thoughts of suicide or you know one who is, contact the Veterans Crisis Line 24/7/365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at <http://veteranscrisisline.net/Chat> or text to 838255.

Media covering this issue can download VA's [Safe Messaging Best Practices fact sheet](#) or visit [www.ReportingOnSuicide.org](http://www.ReportingOnSuicide.org) for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.



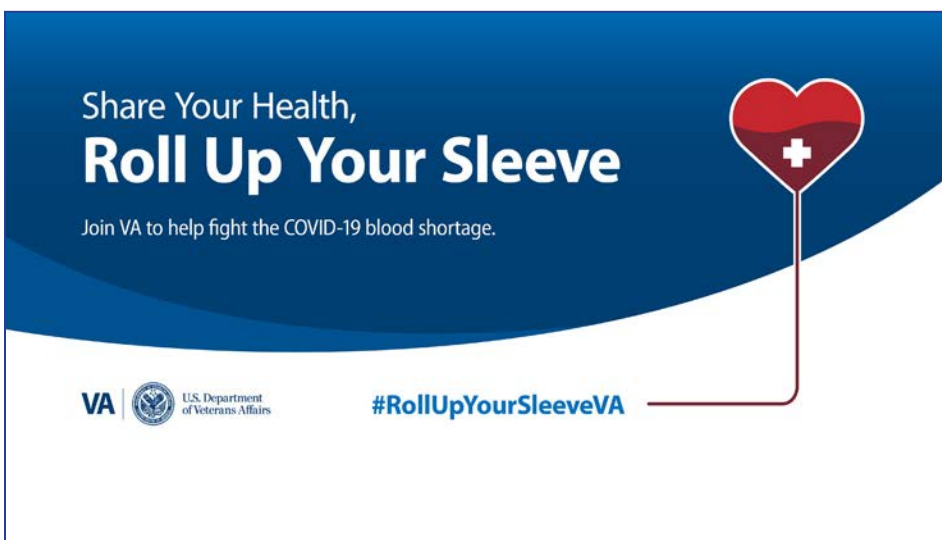
**SUICIDE PREVENTION**

**BeThere**  
YOUR ACTION COULD SAVE A LIFE

# Veterans Crisis Line





**1-800-273-8255**  
**PRESS 1**



Share Your Health,  
**Roll Up Your Sleeve**

Join VA to help fight the COVID-19 blood shortage.



VA  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

**#RollUpYourSleeveVA**



**DISCOVER WHAT MATTERS TO YOU.**  
Live Whole Health.



VA  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

[va.gov/wholehealth](http://va.gov/wholehealth)

# VISN 6 Sites Of Care & VA Vet Centers

## MEDICAL CENTERS

### Asheville VAMC

1100 Tunnel Road  
Asheville, NC 28805  
828-298-7911 | 800-932-6408  
www.asheville.va.gov

### Durham VAMC

508 Fulton Street  
Durham, NC 27705  
919-286-0411 | 888-878-6890  
www.durham.va.gov

### Fayetteville VAMC

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

### Hampton VAMC

100 Emancipation Dr.  
Hampton, VA 23667  
757-722-9961 | 866-544-9961  
www.hampton.va.gov

### Richmond VAMC

1201 Broad Rock Blvd.  
Richmond, VA 23249  
804-675-5000 | 800-784-8381  
www.richmond.va.gov

### Salem VAMC

1970 Roanoke Blvd.  
Salem, VA 24153  
540-982-2463 | 888-982-2463  
www.salem.va.gov

### Salisbury VAMC

1601 Brenner Ave.  
Salisbury, NC 28144  
704-638-9000 | 800-469-8262  
www.salisbury.va.gov

## OUTPATIENT CLINICS

### Albemarle CBOC

1845 W City Drive  
Elizabeth City, NC 27909  
252-331-2191

### Brunswick County CBOC

18 Doctors Cl., Units 2 & 3  
Supply, NC 28462 | 910-754-6141

### Charlotte CBOC

8601 University East Drive  
Charlotte, NC 28213  
704-597-3500

### Charlotte HCC

3506 W. Tyvola Rd.  
Charlotte, NC 28208  
704-329-1300

### Charlottesville CBOC

590 Peter Jefferson Pkwy  
Charlottesville, VA 22911  
434-293-3890

### Chesapeake CBOC

1987 S. Military Highway  
Chesapeake, Va 23320  
757-722-9961

### Clayton CBOC

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

### Danville CBOC

705 Piney Forest Rd.  
Danville, VA 24540  
434-710-4210

### Emporia CBOC

1746 East Atlantic Street  
Emporia, VA 23847  
434-348-1500

### Fayetteville HCC

7300 So. Raeford Rd  
Fayetteville NC 28304  
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106

### Fayetteville Rehabilitation Clinic

4101 Raeford Rd. Ste 100-B  
Fayetteville NC 28304  
910-908-2222

### Franklin CBOC

647 Wayah Street  
Franklin, NC 28734-3390  
828-369-1781

### Fredericksburg CBOC

130 Executive Center Pkwy  
Fredericksburg, VA 22401  
540-370-4468

### Fredericksburg at Southpoint CBOC

10401 Spotsylvania Ave, Ste 300  
Fredericksburg, VA 22408  
540-370-4468

### Goldsboro CBOC

2610 Hospital Road  
Goldsboro, NC 27809  
919-731-4809

### Greenville HCC

401 Moye Blvd.  
Greenville, NC 27834  
252-830-2149

### Hamlet CBOC

100 Jefferson Street  
Hamlet, NC 28345  
910-582-3536

### Hickory CBOC

2440 Century Place,  
SE Hickory, NC 28602  
828-431-5600

### Hillandale Rd. Annex

1824 Hillandale Road Durham  
North Carolina 27705  
919-383-6107

### Jacksonville CBOC

2580 Henderson Drive  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-353-6406

### Jacksonville 2 VA Clinic

306 Brynn Marr Road  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-353-6406

### Jacksonville 3 VA Clinic

4 Josh Court  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-353-6406

### Kernersville HCC

1695 Kernersville Medical Pkwy  
Kernersville, NC 27284  
336-515-5000

### Lynchburg CBOC

1600 Lakeside Drive  
Lynchburg, VA 24501  
434-316-5000

### Morehead City CBOC

5420 U.S. 70  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
252-240-2349

### Raleigh CBOC

3305 Sungate Blvd.  
Raleigh, NC 27610  
919-212-0129

### Raleigh II Annex

3040 Hammond Business Place  
Raleigh, NC 27603  
919-899-6259

### Raleigh III CBOC

2600 Atlantic Ave, Ste 200  
Raleigh, NC 27604  
919-755-2620

### Robeson County CBOC

139 Three Hunts Drive  
Pembroke, NC 28372  
910-272-3220

### Rutherford County CBOC

2270 College Avenue, Suite 145  
Forest City, NC 28043-2459  
828-288-2780

### Sanford CBOC

3112 Tramway  
Road Sanford, NC 27332  
919-775-6160

### Staunton CBOC

102 Lacy B. King Way  
Staunton, VA 24401  
540-886-5777

### Tazewell CBOC

141 Ben Bolt Ave.  
Tazewell, VA 24651  
276-988-8860

### Virginia Beach CBOC

244 Clearfield Avenue  
Virginia Beach, VA  
757-722-9961

### Wilmington HCC

1705 Gardner Rd.  
Wilmington, NC 28405  
910-343-5300

### Wytheville CBOC

165 Peppers Ferry Rd.  
Wytheville, VA 24382-2363  
276-223-5400

## DIALYSIS CENTERS

### VA Dialysis and Blind Rehabilitation Clinics at Brier Creek

8081 Arco Corporate Drive  
Raleigh, NC 27617  
919-286-5220

### VA Dialysis Clinic Fayetteville

2301 Robeson Street, Ste. 101  
Fayetteville, NC 28305, 910-483-9727

## VET CENTERS

### Charlotte Vet Center

2114 Ben Craig Dr.  
Charlotte, NC 28262  
704-549-8025

### Fayetteville Vet Center

2301 Robeson Street  
Fayetteville, NC 28305  
910-488-6252

### Greensboro Vet Center

3515 W Market Street, Suite 120  
Greensboro, NC 27403  
336-333-5366

### Greenville Vet Center

1021 W.H. Smith Blvd.  
Greenville, NC 27834  
252-355-7920

### Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center

110-A Branchwood Drive  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-577-1100

### Norfolk Vet Center

1711 Church Street  
Norfolk, VA 23504  
757-623-7584

### Raleigh Vet Center

8851 Ellstree Lane  
Raleigh, NC 27617  
(919) 361-6419

### Roanoke Vet Center

1401 Franklin Rd SW  
Roanoke, VA 24016  
540-342-9726

### Virginia Beach Vet Center

324 Southport Circle, Suite 102  
Virginia Beach, VA 23452  
757-248-3665

## VISN 6 Newsletter

Voices of VISN 6 is published monthly by VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network.

Questions or comments about the newsletter, email [stephen.wilkins2@va.gov](mailto:stephen.wilkins2@va.gov) or call 919-956-5541

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