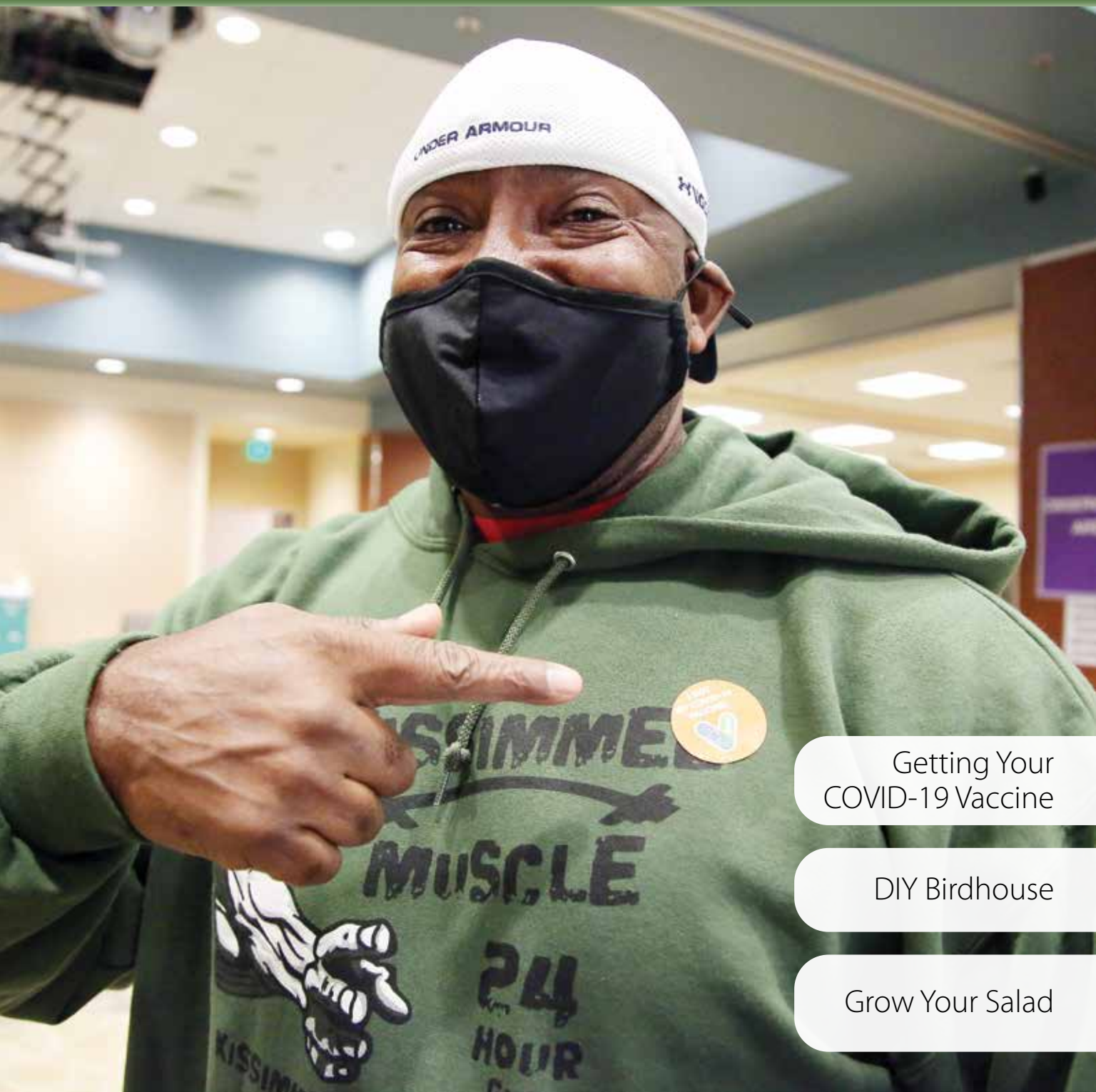


VETERANS Health

SPRING 2021

*Award Winning Wellness Magazine for VISN 8 Veterans
in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico & the U.S. Virgin Islands*

MATTERS



Getting Your
COVID-19 Vaccine

DIY Birdhouse

Grow Your Salad

MANAGING EDITOR

Jason W. Dangel

EDITORIAL BOARD

Mary Kay Rutan

VISN 8 Communication Manager

Jason W. Dangel

VISN 8 Deputy Manager, Office of Communication & Stakeholder Relations

Michelle Winslow

VISN 8 Program Manager, Health Promotion & Disease Prevention (HPDP), and Co-Chair, VISN 8 Preventive Care Committee

Diana Akins

Bay Pines VA Healthcare System (VAHCS)
Acting Veterans Health Education Coordinator & Co-Chair, VISN 8 Veterans Health Coordinators Workgroup

Heather Frebe

Public Affairs Officer, Orlando VA Healthcare System

Kenita Tills

Public Affairs Officer,
West Palm Beach VA Medical Center

Edwin Aviles-Alvarado

Veteran Health Education Coordinator
VA Caribbean Healthcare System

Ed Drohan

Public Affairs Specialist,
James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital

Veterans Health Matters is a quarterly health and wellness magazine for Veterans produced by the VISN 8 Office of Communication. VISN 8 is the country's largest network of VA hospitals and clinics serving Veterans in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Your feedback is welcome. If you'd like to comment on the content, please e-mail or write to:

Managing Editor *Veterans Health Matters*
VISN 8 Office of Communication
140 Fountain Parkway, Suite 600
St. Petersburg, Florida 33716

e-mail: visn8communicationoffice@va.gov
Visit VISN 8 on the web: www.visn8.va.gov

To Our Readers



Spring marks the time for new beginnings. This year, that includes the continuation of our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Our VISN 8 healthcare facilities are working hard to administer COVID-19 vaccines as quickly as possible. Hundreds of thousands of Veterans have already received the vaccine but we still have more work to do. The goal is to offer the vaccine to all Veterans who receive care at VA. Learn more on pages four to five about the importance of this vaccine in beating the pandemic and how you can get your COVID-19 vaccine.

This issue also features activities which may help you relax, have fun, and take pride in the finished products. Check out tips for building your own birdhouse on page three and starting a vegetable garden on page six.

Get ready to work your brain with a wordsearch puzzle on page seven. There, you will also find a recipe for a salad that is a springtime favorite.

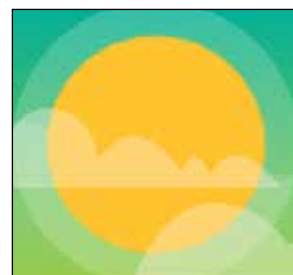
Be well and stay safe!

Miguel H. LaPuz, M.D., MBA
Network Director, VISN 8

VA's COVID Coach App to Manage Stress and Support Self-Care

The COVID Coach app was created for everyone, including Veterans and Servicemembers. It was designed to support your self-care and overall mental health and well-being during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

This app features tools to track your mental health, ways to manage stress, pandemic wellness topics, and connections to resources for additional support.



COVID Coach can be used as a stand-alone educational and self-care tool. It can also work as a supplement to professional mental health care. The app is available for Android and IOS mobile devices at no cost.

To learn more, please visit **mobile.va.gov/app/covid-coach**.

Do-It-Yourself Birdhouse

Made with household items

Here is a great rainy day project to do. You may also enjoy this activity with the help of a young birdwatcher in your life. It takes just a little creativity to turn a household storage container into a backyard birdhouse. Let's get started:

Step 1: Gather supplies

- Clean plastic storage container with lid (about 6 inches tall, 5 inches wide, and 5 inches deep)
- 1/4 cup measuring cup
- Marker
- Box cutter
- Sandpaper
- Paint and small paint brushes
- Wooden dowel or stick (2 inches long)
- Hot glue
- Heavy twine or string (30 inches long)

Step 2: Make a hole

- Place the measuring cup on the outside center of the container, about one-third of the way from the bottom.
- Trace around the measuring cup with the marker. If you don't have a measuring cup, use an object with a two-inch diameter.
- Cut out the marked hole with the box cutter.



Step 3: Paint and glue

- Lightly rub the outside surface with sandpaper. This will make the paint stick better.
- Paint the container. Be creative!
- When the paint is dry, scrape off the paint just below the hole. This is where the dowel or small stick will be glued.
- Use hot glue to glue the end of the dowel to the birdhouse. Press and hold for a minute so the glue can set up properly.

Step 4: Attach string

- Cut two small holes or slats in the container lid, about one inch from each end.
- Thread each end of the string through each hole from the top. Tie the string together under the lid to create a loop.

Step 5: Hang it up and watch the show!

- Hang your backyard birdhouse in a tree or from a sturdy garden pole at least five feet off the ground.

Getting Your COVID-19 Vaccine

Important information about the COVID-19 vaccine for Veterans



VA health care facilities across the country are working hard to administer COVID-19 vaccines to Veterans as quickly as possible.

In VISN 8, which includes VA facilities in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, hundreds of thousands of Veterans have already received the vaccine. And many others have scheduled their appointments to get vaccinated. These men and women know that vaccination is a critical and necessary step in beating the pandemic.

The following are some frequently asked questions that will help you better understand the importance of the vaccine. The answers will also explain where and when you can get it, and actions you should continue to take after you are vaccinated.

Who can get the vaccine?

Veterans enrolled for VA health care benefits can receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Veterans who are not enrolled, or do not currently receive care at VA, can visit VA's Eligibility webpage to learn more: **www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility**.



When does VA anticipate having enough vaccine to vaccinate all Veterans?

VA's goal is to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to all Veterans who receive care at VA. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) project that there should be enough COVID-19 vaccine supply for all Americans by June 2021.

Where can I get the vaccine?

VA is offering the vaccine at facilities nationwide. In VISN 8, all medical centers and many outpatient clinics are offering the vaccine. You can learn more about vaccination activities in VISN 8 by visiting the appropriate webpage below:

Healthcare System	COVID-19 Vaccination Webpage
Bay Pines VA Healthcare System	www.baypines.va.gov/services/covid-19-vaccines.asp
James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital	www.tampa.va.gov/services/covid-19-vaccines.asp
Miami VA Healthcare System	www.miami.va.gov/services/covid-19-vaccines.asp
North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System	www.northflorida.va.gov/services/covid-19-vaccines.asp
Orlando VA Healthcare System	www.orlando.va.gov/services/covid-19-vaccines.asp
West Palm Beach VA Medical Center	www.westpalmbeach.va.gov/services/covid-19-vaccines.asp
VA Caribbean Healthcare System	www.caribbean.va.gov/services/covid-19-vaccines.asp

How safe is the vaccine?

The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reviewed data from large clinical trials of the authorized COVID-19 vaccines to make sure they are safe and effective. The VA, CDC, and FDA will continue to monitor the safety and efficacy of these vaccines over time. This process will help to determine how long the vaccines protect against COVID-19. It will also identify if there are any rare or long-term side effects we need to know about.

Can I stop wearing a mask in VA facilities after I receive the vaccine?

No. After you receive a COVID-19 vaccine, you will still need to wear a mask that covers your mouth and nose when you are in a VA facility. This practice goes along with other VA safety rules like practicing physical distancing. Learn more about CDC safety measures at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick. These safety steps help protect you, your fellow Veterans, and VA staff.

Where can I get more information about the vaccine?

Veterans can get more information about the COVID-19 vaccine by visiting www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine, visiting their local medical center's vaccine webpage (listed on the left), or by speaking with a provider.



Watch the Video!

Check out the video, "Getting Your COVID-19 Vaccine" at www.visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp.

Grow Your Own Salad

Are you looking for a new hobby? Want to eat healthier? Growing some of your own vegetables can help you do both! But starting a garden can be a challenge if you are not sure where to start. That is especially true if you do not have room or if you want to keep things small and simple.

Consider container gardening. This type of gardening works well for decks or patios. Plus, when fresh and tasty vegetables are just a few steps away, you are more likely to eat more of them.

What to Grow

Start with something easy, like salad vegetables. The best times to plant depend on where you live in the Sunshine Healthcare Network. Some vegetables can be planted in the spring. These include tomatoes, swiss chard, peppers, some types of spinach, and summer squash. Other vegetables grow best in the cooler months, between September and February. These cool season crops include kale, collard and mustard greens, and escarole. Also, consider growing some fresh herbs, like parsley or basil. They add wonderful flavors to salads, soups, and many other foods.

Once you decide what you want to grow, here are more gardening tips:

Containers

Choose ones with drainage holes so excess water can escape. Fill with planting soil, not soil from your garden. Soil-less mixes are a good choice, or you can make your own. For example, combine peat moss, compost, and perlite. This will create a medium-packed mix that will absorb water but allow excess water to drain. Place containers where they will get at least six hours of direct sunlight every day.

Fertilizer

Some planting soil mixes already contain fertilizer, but others do not. Whether you prefer to use organic or inorganic versions, most vegetables grow best with a balanced fertilizer. Look on the bag of fertilizer for three numbers to identify how much nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium it contains. The numbers should be close to "6-6-6." There are some exceptions, such as leafy vegetables that need only nitrogen fertilizer to grow well.

Seeds vs. Transplants

There are pros and cons to each. Seeds are less expensive and offer more plant varieties to choose from. Transplants require less growing time and less uncertainty, especially during the early growing phases.

When to Water

Plants that grow in containers will need frequent watering. It helps to test the soil daily. Water thoroughly around the base of the plant when the top inch of soil is dry.

Enjoy the 'Veggies' of Your Labor

When you harvest your veggies, take pride in your work. For much more on gardening, including what grows best and when in your region, visit gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu.



Word Search

Find these words from the stories in this issue of Veterans Health Matters. Remember to also look up, down, and backwards. Good luck!

BIRDHOUSE	F	L	M	V	A	C	C	I	N	E
CONTAINER	B	I	R	D	H	O	U	S	E	B
COVID	D	G	G	L	N	V	P	F	F	U
EFFECTIVE	V	X	B	F	H	I	K	V	F	A
GARDEN	S	I	K	N	R	D	S	G	E	W
MASK	E	F	A	S	P	I	N	A	C	H
SAFE	E	Y	B	D	K	M	V	R	T	Y
SEEDS	D	F	J	P	X	K	A	D	I	N
SPINACH	S	S	E	R	T	S	W	E	V	D
STRESS	A	C	O	N	T	A	I	N	E	R
VACCINE	L	F	H	E	B	M	S	J	M	O

Spinach Strawberry Salad



Ingredients

- 4 cups baby spinach, packed
- 2 cups strawberries, sliced
- 1 medium avocado, sliced
- ¼ medium red onion, thinly sliced

Poppy Seed Dressing

- 2 teaspoons poppy seeds
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon salt

Directions

1. For the dressing, add all ingredients to a small mason jar. Secure the lid tightly and shake well to combine.
2. Lightly combine the salad ingredients in a large bowl.
3. Add the dressing to the salad and toss lightly.

Options: Add diced cucumbers or zucchini. To reduce the fat content, leave out the avocado.

Nutritional information: (4 servings). Per serving: 149 calories, 12 g total fat, 5 g saturated fat, 12 g carbohydrates, 6 g dietary fiber, 2 g protein, and 104 mg sodium.

Free Veterans Health Matters Subscription

To request your free copy of **Veterans Health Matters** and how you would like to receive your subscription, visit www.healthylife.com/SubscribeVHM.

You can also request your free subscription using the following methods: by U.S. mail, email, or phone.

By Mail:

Fill out your information (please print below) and put in a stamped envelope with this address:

American Institute for Preventive Medicine
c/o VISN 8 – VHM
30445 Northwestern Hwy., Ste. 350
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

(Please print)

First Name Middle Initial

Last Name

Address

City

State

Zip

By Email:

VISN8VHM@healthylife.com
Be sure to include the above information.

By Phone:

(800) 345-2476 – press 5 for English or press 6 for Spanish



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)

VISN 8 Office of Communication
140 Fountain Parkway, Ste 600
St. Petersburg, FL 33716



Virtual Urgent Care 24/7

Learn more at www.visn8.va.gov/ccc.asp.

VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

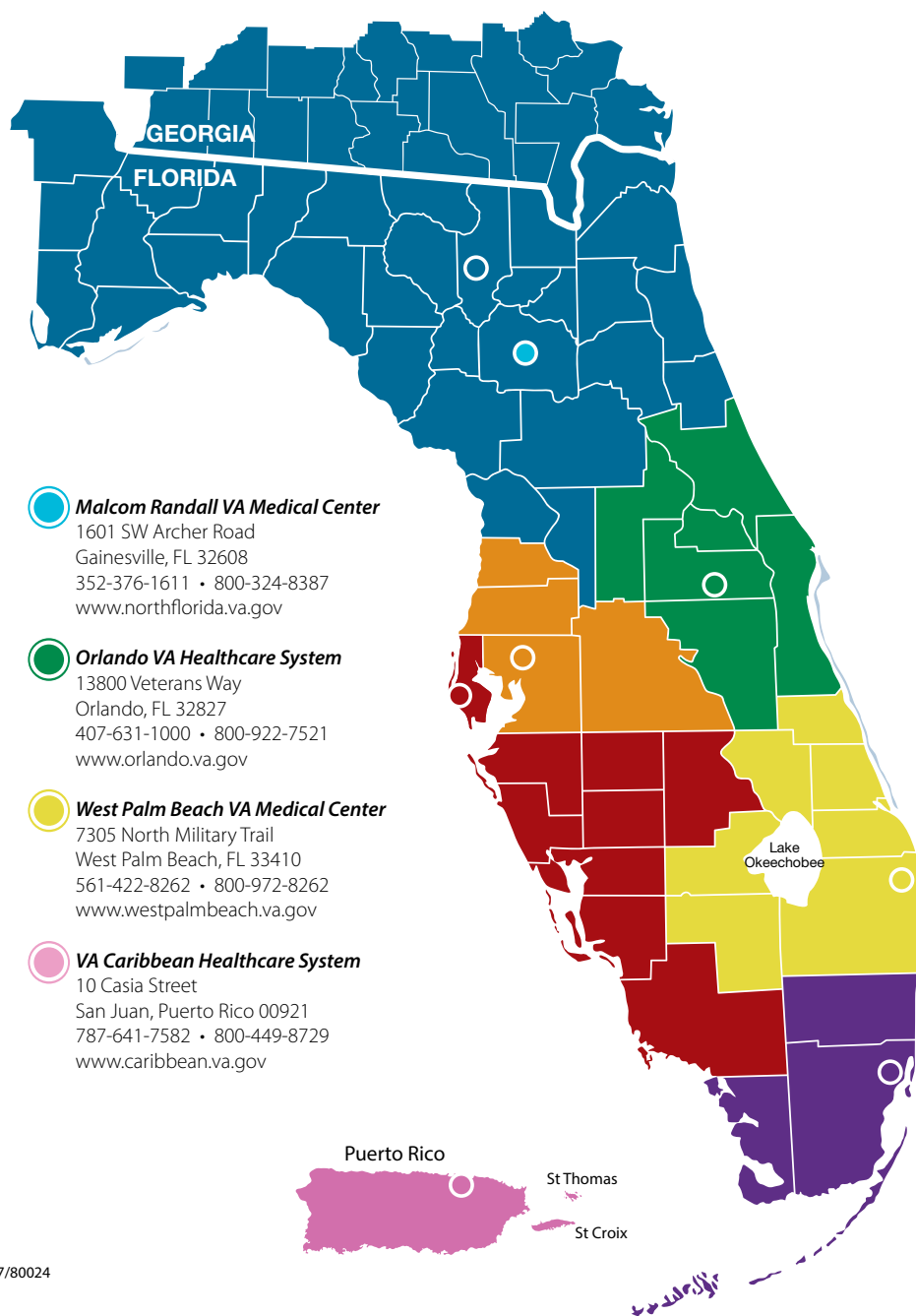
www.visn8.va.gov



at all Medical Centers

Find a VA hospital or clinic near you:

www.va.gov/health/FindCare.asp



Bruce W. Carter Dept. of VA Medical Center

1201 NW 16th Street
Miami, FL 33125
305-575-7000 • 888-276-1785
www.miami.va.gov



C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center

10000 Bay Pines Blvd.
Bay Pines, FL 33744
727-398-6661 • 888-820-0230
www.baypines.va.gov



James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital

13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd.
Tampa, FL 33612
813-972-2000 • 888-716-7787
www.tampa.va.gov



Lake City VA Medical Center

619 South Marion Avenue
Lake City, FL 32025
386-755-3016 • 800-308-8387
www.northflorida.va.gov



Malcom Randall VA Medical Center

1601 SW Archer Road
Gainesville, FL 32608
352-376-1611 • 800-324-8387
www.northflorida.va.gov



Orlando VA Healthcare System

13800 Veterans Way
Orlando, FL 32827
407-631-1000 • 800-922-7521
www.orlando.va.gov



West Palm Beach VA Medical Center

7305 North Military Trail
West Palm Beach, FL 33410
561-422-8262 • 800-972-8262
www.westpalmbeach.va.gov



VA Caribbean Healthcare System

10 Casia Street
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00921
787-641-7582 • 800-449-8729
www.caribbean.va.gov