

Check-in for your VA appointment with your phone!

VA now offers a new patient check-in application with two options: pre-check-in and mobile check-in for your health care appointments.

Pre-check-in: After confirming your text appointment reminder, you may receive a link for pre-check-in. Pre-check-in allows you to review your contact information, emergency contact and next-of-kin up to seven days before your appointment, saving you time when you arrive for your appointment. If you've opted out of text appointment reminders, you can restart these reminders by texting "START" to 53079 or by replying "START" to any previous text message from VA.

Mobile check-in: To check-in for an appointment with mobile check-in once you've arrived at your facility, just follow these three simple instructions to avoid standing in lines at the check-in desk:

- 1** Scan the QR code found on posters located in participating clinic areas or text "Check in" to 53079;
- 2** Wait until you get a text back with a link (this should only take a few seconds); and
- 3** Tap on the link to start your check-in. Once completed, you can have a seat and a VA staff member will come get you for your appointment.

If you don't have a smart phone, or you need to update any of your information, please see a staff member at the check-in desk.

A Message from the Director



From one Veteran to another, I appreciate that you have continued to trust the VA Maryland Health Care System with

your care during challenging times and beyond. So many aspects of our world have changed over the last couple of years, but one thing remains the same and that's our commitment to providing safe, quality and compassionate care to Maryland's Veterans. With more than 3,000 employees, we continue providing the full spectrum of care with programs for all Veterans.

In this newsletter, you'll find a variety of articles and announcements to help you maximize and navigate the programs and services available throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System. You've earned this care, so please make sure you're taking full advantage of it.

Thank you for your service and for choosing the VA Maryland Health Care System.

Sincerely,
Jonathan R. Eckman, P.E.
Director, VA Maryland Health
Care System
(U.S. Army Veteran)

VA Mobile Check-in for Appointments
Now Available in select clinics!

- ▶ With VA mobile check-in, you can check-in for your VA appointments using your smartphone.
- ▶ If you see this poster in your waiting area, mobile check-in is available.



VA Mobile Check-in | Fast. Easy. Convenient.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR NUMBERS?



Knowing your numbers is the key to a healthier you. Be an active participant in your health care and know what your four health numbers are and what they should be. If they are not where they should be, you can take control of your numbers to get them where they need to be. Visit your Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) or health care provider to get started.

Four Health Numbers You Should Know:

1. Blood Pressure
2. Body Mass Index (BMI)
3. Blood Sugar
4. Total Cholesterol

Understanding your numbers can protect you against heart disease, diabetes, stroke and more. It can also help manage existing conditions to prevent life-threatening outcomes.

Now is the time to your check blood pressure, cholesterol and other numbers to see where you stand before health problems arise. Schedule an appointment with your VA primary care provider to check your numbers and more.

Women Veterans Program Manager *Siobhan Kirksey* is on the scene.



The VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) wants women Veterans to feel welcomed, included and well cared for. Our new Women Veterans Program Manager, Siobhan Kirksey (*pictured above on the right*), is leading that charge. A master's-trained nurse who is pursuing a doctoral degree in nursing, Kirksey is an advocate for preventive care for women, including routine screening for cervical cancer, breast cancer, osteoporosis and other health concerns.

Before joining the VAMHCS, Kirksey, whose first name is pronounced “shi-VAWN,” worked with several vulnerable populations, such as Medicaid and Medicare beneficiaries. “While working in the community I assisted several Veterans to enroll in needed services with VA. I wanted to use the skills that I have learned over the years to help the woman Veteran population receive the appropriate health care by listening to needs, reducing barriers, improving access and improving outcomes,” she said.

New to the VAMHCS, she hit the ground running, playing an important role in the virtual public forum for women Veterans that took place on March 9. These twice-a year forums address current health care needs, concerns and issues with the goal of continually improving VA health care services for women Veterans in a safe and sensitive environment.

Kirksey notes that a few misconceptions about the Women's Health Clinic and program have become barriers. She aims to dispel those misconceptions and myths. “Our Women's Health Clinic is a safe space for women Veterans where they can receive treatment from providers who are passionate about women Veterans' concerns and issues,” she said.

Additional goals for Kirksey include expanding education, outreach and community partnerships. “If there are barriers to accessing care, I want to hear them first-hand and work to provide timely solutions that improve access and outcomes.”

“Women Veterans can access health care at all of our facilities throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System, and we also offer options in the community, depending on the need,” Kirksey said.

Kirksey invites women Veterans to call her directly at 410-605-7275 or 443-691-5687 (mobile).

Ten Apps for Mental Health & Wellness

Everyone faces mental health or wellness challenges at some point in their lives. Issues can range from trouble sleeping and managing anger to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and thoughts of harming oneself. Thankfully, there are apps that can provide reminders and safe options to help manage mental health challenges. VA apps, which are free and have shown to be effective in evidence-based research, serve as supportive tools for Veterans on their wellness journey.

Below is a list of free apps that were designed specifically for Veterans, but are available and beneficial for anyone. You can find these apps and more at mobile.va.gov/appstore/all, including the following:



PTSD Coach provides the information, support and tools needed to manage PTSD. A companion app, PTSD Family Coach, is for family members and friends supporting someone with PTSD.



ACT Coach aims to help Veterans live with unpleasant thoughts, feelings and impulses without avoiding them or being controlled by them.



AIMS for Anger Management provides users with education about anger, opportunities for finding support, the ability to create an anger management plan, anger tracking and other tools to help manage angry reactions.



Beyond MST is a secure, trauma-sensitive mobile app created for survivors of Military Sexual Trauma (MST).



Insomnia Coach features a guided, weekly training plan to help you track and improve sleep.



Couples Coach is designed for partners who want to improve their relationship and explore new ways to connect.



STAIR Coach is designed to help users manage trauma symptoms and help improve their emotional well-being and relationships with others.



Stay Quit Coach helps people create a tailored plan to quit smoking and stay smoke-free.



VA Mental Health Checkup for Veterans allows Veterans to monitor, assess and access information for mental health conditions from the comfort of their home.



COVID Coach supports self-care and overall mental health during the coronavirus pandemic.

Because mobile apps offer a significant potential to deliver effective mental health interventions, they have emerged as viable tools to bridge mental health treatment gaps. They do not, however, replace treatment from health care professionals. If you have concerns about your mental health, contact your VA care team. If you are having thoughts of suicide, call the **Veterans Crisis Line at 988 and press 1**. Millions of Veterans have called when they needed crisis support. We're here if you need us.

SIGN UP to Receive Emergency Text Notifications



Don't be caught off guard if an unexpected situation, such as inclement weather, impacts our clinic operations throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System! Sign up to receive emergency text notifications right on your smartphone so you get notified about weather or emergency related clinic or facility closures. Simply text vamarlyland to 333111 and follow the prompts.

LGBTQ + Support for Veterans



At the VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS), we promote the health, welfare and dignity of LGBTQ+ Veterans and their families. If you're a Veteran who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning or a related identity, we're committed to serving your needs. We also focus on ensuring a safe, welcoming and affirmative environment when providing Veterans with sensitive and high-quality health care

- services like:
- Hormone therapy
 - Substance use disorder and alcohol use disorder treatment
 - Testing and treatment for HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI)
 - Mental health care
 - Psychosocial assessments for gender-confirming surgeries and hormone therapy

The LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator for the VAMHCS can help Veterans access the care they need in a safe and sensitive environment. "As the LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator I often hear from Veterans and providers who have questions or concerns about LGBTQ+ care here at VAMHCS," said Aimee Olivera-Sanchez. "Some Veterans are new to the area and need assistance connecting to resources to help them feel at home. Others request help with the process of getting specialty services like gender-affirming hormone therapy, prosthetics or transgender voice services. Providers might also ask for guidance so they can give their patients the best possible care. All of these are already available at the VAMHCS but can seem confusing to connect with."

LGBTQ+ Veterans who need assistance connecting to all the resources available to them throughout the VAMHCS may contact Aimee Olivera-Sanchez at **443-401-8645** or **VAMHCSLGBTQVetCare@va.gov**.

Social Programs and Services

In addition to specialized programs geared toward women Veterans and Veterans who identify as LGBTQ+, the VAMHCS offers additional social programs and services aimed at educating clinicians and staff, increasing ethnic and cultural awareness, breaking down barriers to access to care, and addressing Veterans' diverse and unique needs. This ensures all Veterans receive the same high quality and compassionate care throughout our health care system, delivered in a safe and sensitive environment.

The program listing below includes details on who to contact for more information.

Adaptive Sports Program
Daniel Vigus
Adaptive Sports Coordinator
410-642-2411, ext. 22917

Caregiver Support Program
Jacqueline Adams
Caregiver Support Program Manager
410-605-7000, ext. 54028

Homeless Veterans Program
Craig Cook, LCSW-C
Homeless Veterans Coordinator
443-833-4419

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Assistance Program
IPV Assistance Program Coordinators
Kaitlin Savarese
443-525-0979
Lindsay Wilson
410-591-3004

HELP Veterans Village to Expand



In August 2018, the HELP Veterans Village opened on the campus of the Perry Point VA Medical Center to provide safe, affordable and permanent housing for at-risk and formerly homeless Veterans and their families. This innovative community was made possible thanks to the award of 75 project-based Department of Housing and Urban Development and VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers.

The success of the HELP Veterans Village, along with a continued need for affordable housing in the area, recently lead to the award of an additional 50 projected-based HUD-VASH vouchers to support the expansion of this important initiative to support at-risk and formerly homeless Veterans. Phase II of the HELP Veterans Village will include a mix of an additional 50 renovated and newly constructed apartments close to important VA medical, vocational and behavioral health services. Construction on Phase II of the HELP Veterans Village is anticipated to being in early 2023.

Help is available

If you—or a Veteran you know—are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless due to financial hardship, unemployment, addiction, depression or transition from jail, contact **Craig Cook**, Homeless Veterans Coordinator, at **433-833-4419** to get help with:

- ▶ Immediate food and shelter, including both transitional and permanent housing
- ▶ Job training, life skills development and education
- ▶ Support with justice system navigation and community re-entry from jail
- ▶ Financial support to prevent homelessness
- ▶ Treatment for addiction and depression
- ▶ Health and dental care

Tips for Using the VA Pharmacy

When it comes to managing pharmacy needs and staying current with medications, Veterans have several options through the VA Pharmacy.

REDUCE WAITING TIME TO RECEIVE PRESCRIPTION REFILLS:

Reorder your next prescription the day you receive your current one. Don't wait for doses to run low. This allows pharmacists to check with providers to ensure refills are available if prescriptions have expired. It also allows plenty of time for the delivery of medications before doses run low.

Use one of the following four options to refill your prescriptions: **1) with your provider at the time of your visit, 2) by phone, 3) by mail, or 4) online.** New prescriptions, if needed on the day they are issued by your provider, can still be filled at the outpatient pharmacy window at the Baltimore and Perry Point VA Medical Centers.



REFILL BY PHONE

1. Call the Prescription Refill Line at **410-605-7395**.
2. After hearing the greeting, enter your full nine-digit Social Security number followed by the “#” (pound) sign.
3. Press option “2” for Pharmacy Information.
4. Press option “1” to order prescription refills (press option “2” if you want to check on the status of your prescription refill).
5. Enter your prescription number, followed by the “#” (pound) sign.

If at any time you need to speak directly with a Pharmacy staff member, enter “8” followed by the “#” (pound) sign. *All refills ordered by phone will be mailed directly to the Veteran's home address.*



REFILL BY MAIL

If a Veteran gets an initial prescription from the VA Maryland Health Care System and is eligible for refills, they will be issued a refill request form and a return mailing label with their prescription. Simply fill out and sign the refill slip and use the label provided to mail the slip back to one of our two outpatient pharmacies:

- **Pharmacy Service, VA Medical Center, 10 North Greene Street, Baltimore, MD 21201; or**
- **Pharmacy Service, PO Box 1015, VA Medical Center, Perry Point, MD 21902**

Please **allow 14 days** for processing if you mail in your prescription request.



REFILL ONLINE

The VA's My HealtheVet system offers a secure online prescription refill service. The refill is sent directly to your home. To access the prescription refill service, users must register for My HealtheVet at **www.myhealth.va.gov**.

NO REMAINING REFILLS?

1. If your primary care team ordered your medication:
 - a. Contact your team at the telephone number provided on your Clinic Check Out Sheet.
 - b. Use the Secure Messaging option on the My HealtheVet online service to send a message to your primary care team.
2. If the medication was prescribed by a specialist, contact the specialty provider listed on the prescription label.
3. Call the Telephone Care Line for the VA Maryland Health Care System at **800-865-2441** and select the option for “Prescription Refills or Questions About Your Medications.”

NEW PRESCRIPTIONS

If you were seen by a non-VA provider and need a new prescription, please obtain the documentation and/or records from your non-VA provider's office and then contact your VA Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) nurse.

PRESCRIPTION COPAYS

If you have any questions about prescription copays or charges, please contact a billing representative at **866-393-0006**.

MEDICATION SAFETY

Please note that each prescription is handled with individual care and concern. To maintain accuracy, the VA Pharmacy staff uses state-of-the-art technology and system safety checks.

MEDICATION MANAGEMENT FOR INPATIENTS

Please do not bring your medications to VA medical centers when being admitted. Veterans being admitted through the Emergency Department or during planned inpatient stays will not be permitted to keep bottles of medications they bring from home. We cannot accept medications for storage during your time as an inpatient, especially if the medicines are controlled substances. Our electronic health record keeps a current list of medications that can be given to you as an inpatient, so it is not necessary to bring them into the medical center.

DON'T RUN OUT! BE PROACTIVE



To receive your medications on time, you must order your refills at least 14 days before your medicine runs out. *It's best to order your refills as soon as you receive your medication in the mail so that the next refill will be shipped to you before you are scheduled to run out.*

The Compassionate Contact Core Creates Real Buddies



Volunteer Cassandra Compton Kapoor (left) and Air Force Veteran Richard Jones

When the pandemic kept Cassandra Compton Kapoor from her usual volunteer work in the Emergency Room at the Baltimore VA Medical Center, she signed up to participate in the Compassionate Contact Corps Program. “I wanted to stay involved as a volunteer at the VA, and this was an interesting program.”

The Compassionate Contact Corps Program, established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, provides Veterans stuck at home and alone with important social connections with designated VA volunteers. Developed and implemented by the VA Center for Development & Civic Engagement, it pairs volunteers and Veterans to provide important and ongoing connections via telephone. Matches are made based on mutual interests to socialize once or twice weekly for 15 to 60 minutes. Veterans are referred to the program by their VA clinician to enhance their overall wellbeing. Volunteers in the Compassionate Contact Corps are trained in confidentiality, privacy, customer service, empathy, compassion, support and boundaries.

For Veterans living alone or who are unable to leave their homes, the weekly phone calls reduce loneliness and support caregivers who may be overwhelmed.

Kapoor matched in August 2020 with Richard Jones, a 67-year-old Air Force Veteran who once flew C-5 airplanes for a dozen years before retiring from the military. When he saw the email about the program, he signed up. “I live alone and struggle with PTSD,” he said.

Their match took a turn that no one could predict. During one of their routine weekly calls in February 2022, Kapoor noticed that Jones sounded different. “He didn't sound like himself, and he was out of breath. I asked if he had to run for the phone, but he said he did not. Since I knew what he sounded like normally, I felt alarmed,” she said. He told her he was experiencing some pressure in his chest but was okay. Kapoor explained that she felt she needed to call 9-1-1. “He agreed and gave me the information to make the call.” Unbeknownst to either of them, Jones was in the throes of a heart attack, and the 9-1-1 call saved his life.

Although participants since 2020, neither Kapoor nor Jones can identify each other in person since they connect via weekly phone calls. But their voices connect them, and they've developed a wonderful friendship as a result of the program, affectionally known as “The Phone Buddy Program” at the VAMHCS. Currently, 36 volunteers connect with more than 70 Veterans as part of this initiative.

“Because loneliness can lead to depression, suicidal ideation and increased risk for hospitalization, the Compassion Contact Corps Program is providing life-saving connections on a variety of levels for Veterans throughout the VAMHCS, said Susan Kern, program manager for Voluntary Service. “It's a win-win for both parties.”

“I look forward to our weekly chats as much as he does. We have built a true relationship,” said Kapoor.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer in the Phone Buddy Program or you are a Veteran enrolled at the VAMHCS and you would like to be connected to a VA volunteer, contact Joyce Kuwae, Voluntary Service Specialist, at 410-642-1039.

Beneficiary Travel Claims Go Paperless!

Eliminate the hassle of paperwork and process your travel claims faster with the Beneficiary Travel Self Service System (BTSSS). This electronic system makes it convenient for Veterans or their designated caregiver to use a smart phone or computer to submit a travel claim. No need to fill out the paper VA Form 10-3542 – Veteran/Beneficiary Claim for Reimbursement of Travel Expenses!

With this system, Veterans can enjoy benefits such as:

- Shorter processing time. (Submit your claim before you travel to your appointment, and it can be processed immediately following the appointment);
- More convenience and ease in submitting claims 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- Timely processing and payment of travel reimbursements;
- Self-help tools to find answers to questions;
- Tracking claims from the submission to payment;
- Reasons for claims denials and information on how to appeal the decision;
- A list of VA appointments to select from to file a claim; and
- A map to confirm the mileage and route of travel selected for payment or allow changes to the route of travel.

Not sure how to get started? Just follow these simple steps.

How do I file a claim for general travel expenses?

If you're eligible for general health care travel reimbursement, you will need to file a claim for each appointment. Be sure to submit your claim within 30 days of your appointment. If you become eligible for travel reimbursement after your appointment, submit your claim within 30 days of when you become eligible.

File your claim online

Follow the steps below to submit a travel reimbursement claim for each appointment through our BTSSS.

1. Go to our AccessVA website

<https://access.va.gov/accessva>

The page will ask you to select your category to find the applications you can sign in with. Select I am a Veteran.

Then click on the **Veteran Travel Claim Entry** logo.

Note: Caregivers will also select **I am a Veteran**.

2. Sign into the travel claim entry portal

You can sign in with your **DS Logon, My HealtheVet, ID.me or VA PIV** account.

If you don't have one of these accounts, you can register for a sign-in partner account. Follow the instructions for your chosen account to sign in.

3. Go to your Beneficiary Travel profile

Once you sign in, you'll go to the portal welcome page.

Check the box to agree to the Terms and Conditions. Then, click on the **Proceed to Profile Review** button.

Note: If the button doesn't work, make sure you've checked the Terms and Conditions box. Then wait a few seconds and try again.

4. Review your profile and go to your dashboard

Save any needed updates to your personal, contact or financial information.

When you're finished, click on the **Proceed to My Dashboard** button.

Note: Caregivers will first click **Proceed to My Veteran List**, then **Select this Veteran** to go to the dashboard of a specific Veteran.

5. Create a claim

You can do this in either of these two ways:

- Go to the "My Appointments" area. In the "Associated Appointments" column, click **Create Claim** for the appointment you're claiming travel pay for.
- Or go to the "My Claims" area. Click **Create** in the upper right corner. Then, click **Create a Claim** for the appointment you're claiming travel pay for.

This will open the Initiate a Claim form.

Confirm or update the address on the page. Then click **Create Claim and Add Expenses**.

6. Add your expenses and receipts

On the Claim Expenses page, check the boxes to choose an expense type and follow the instructions to add information about your expenses.

Click on the **Add Attachments** button to add copies of your expense receipts.

7. Submit your claim

Review the Beneficiary Travel Agreement Notice and check the box to show your agreement.

Then click **Submit Claim**.

Note: If you need time to gather receipts or other information, you can choose to save your claim and come back later to edit it. But you'll still need to submit it within 30 days of your appointment. If you need any assistance or more information about BTSSS, please contact the Beneficiary Travel Department at **410-605-7318**.

Where to find more instructions

Get step-by-step details for how to create an account, add appointments, file and edit claims and manage your travel reimbursement profile.

Go to our videos on how to use BTSSS (YouTube) at <https://bit.ly/3nHMHFS>.

Blindness Can't Stop Him

Veteran Conducts Cooking Demos for Other Visually Impaired Veterans



Air Force Veteran Eugene Brown

More than a decade ago, **Air Force Veteran Eugene Brown**, now 75, held a well-paying position in a bank, a job he loved. He had a company car, set his own schedule and balanced office time with visiting customers in the field.

That was before glaucoma robbed him of some of his vision. "At that time, my vision could always be corrected to 20/20. Then it couldn't, and I had to stop driving. Quitting my job was hard, but I had to do it," Brown said.

Diminishing vision forced him to find a new way to work and live. He trained with a local organization that served people with vision impairment and learned to manage an eatery. "This program required those interested in management in that field to take cooking classes, even though we wouldn't be doing the cooking," he said. "We had to know the work of all our employees to better manage them." He attended cooking classes at Anne Arundel County Community College. "I enjoyed that," he said.

After Brown became a commissary manager, he continued cooking at home. Now totally blind and a participant of the VA Maryland Health Care System's (VAMHCS) Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) program, Brown conducted a virtual cooking demonstration from his home to show fellow Veterans that being blind does not translate to dependence on others. In fact, Brown routinely cooks meals for his wife and himself.

The goal of the demo was to show visually impaired Veterans that they can cook and grow new skills, despite vision impairment.

On the menu was beef and chicken mix meatloaf and a chicken salad. He used a small food processor to chop the onions and an air fryer to cook the meat loaf, which was equipped with tactile bump dots. The raised bumps, the timer and other tools are among the many tools that VA provides through the VIST and blind rehabilitation program.

"You have to be organized," Brown said, showing all the ingredients arranged in a row in order of use. He also demonstrated convenient hacks to keep prep surfaces and the ingredients clean and explained the importance of hand hygiene to avoid cross contamination while cooking. Wearing gloves and a chef hat, he offered a few strategies to Veterans, including substituting prepackaged stuffing mix for bread in the meatloaf recipe and using salsa and a packet of dried soup seasoning to add flavor. Once Brown combined all the ingredients, he shaped the loaf and put it in the air fryer and set a timer using tactile markings to select the time and temperature. Streamed in the auditorium at the Baltimore VA Medical Center, the demo was geared toward those with various levels of vision

Continued Next Page

impairment, which can vary, according to Bill Lange, Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist. “Some Veterans with glaucoma can see more than others, and in some cases, the glaucoma can progress to total blindness,” he said. “Even with treatment, the functional loss is different for everyone.”

“We have issued a lot of liquid level indicators for pouring, colored cutting boards for contrast when cutting and bump dots to mark appliances,” said VIST Coordinator Chana Hurvitz. “We recommend large-numbered measuring cups and spoons in addition to the mini food processor that Mr. Brown used,” she said. “The goal is to foster independence and safety for visually impaired Veterans.”

Brown’s cooking demonstration was offered as part of a monthly Blind Rehab Support Group meeting, an event that visually impaired Veterans rely on. “Sometimes you can be struggling with a problem, and then you come to a meeting and find a few other Veterans who struggled with the same issue, and they have already come up with solutions,” said Vietnam era Air Force Veteran William Fisher III, who attended with his wife.

Early treatment is critically important to prevent some common eye diseases from causing permanent vision loss or blindness. Veterans enrolled in the VAMHCS are encouraged to schedule an eye exam by calling the Optometry Clinic at **410-605-7747**.

Veterans Community Care Program Process Explained

Veterans may be eligible for care through a health care provider in their local community if they meet certain criteria: If needed care is not available from VA, the Veteran meets certain standards for drive and wait times to receive care, or community care is in the best medical interest of the Veteran.

Veterans must still receive approval from VA before receiving care from a community provider to avoid being billed for the care. An exception to this is the new Urgent Care benefit. This would be to treat minor injuries and illnesses that are not life-threatening, such as colds, strep throat, sprained muscles and skin and ear infections. Find more details at www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/Urgent_Care.asp.

The new, simplified process for a Veteran to receive care from a provider in the community can be outlined in four key steps.

1 ELIGIBILITY: VA confirms a Veteran’s eligibility to receive community care. Once confirmed, VA sends the Veteran and the selected community provider a referral. VA also sends the Veteran’s medical documentation to the community provider to ensure proper care coordination between their VA care team and the community provider.

- 2 APPOINTMENTS: VA staff member schedules appointment with a provider in VA’s network.** Once VA confirms eligibility and identifies a provider, a VA staff member schedules the appointment with a provider in VA’s network.
- 3 GETTING CARE: Veteran receives care from a community provider in VA’s network.** When a Veteran arrives for the appointment, the community provider should have the VA referral and medical documentation on file. If a Veteran needs a follow-up appointment, the community provider should check to make sure VA has authorized additional care before scheduling the appointment.
- 4 BILLING: Community provider sends the claim to a Third-Party Administrator (TPA) or VA for payment.** Veterans may have to pay a copayment for non-service-connected care, just as they do at VA medical facilities. Bills for copayments will come from VA, not the community provider. For help with any billing issues, Veterans can call the VA Community Care Contact Center at **877-881-7618**.

Think you have a need for receiving care in the community at VA expense? First speak with your VA provider to determine your eligibility. Learn more at www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE.

Veteran’s Artistic Talents Send Her to Florida



U.S. Army Veteran Renee Simmons (left) and Kelsey Eisenhauer, Creative Arts Therapist

Each year, thousands of Veterans receiving care at VA facilities throughout the nation, including the VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS), participate in local creative arts competitions. First-place entries from each facility then move forward to compete nationally.

The culmination of the 2021 national competition took place this spring during the 41st annual VA National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, held in St. Petersburg, Florida. Among those in attendance was U.S. Army Veteran Renee Simmons. Simmons took first place in the VAMHCS competition with two art entries, and she also performed an original vocal. While she did not place nationally, Simmons was selected as one of just eight participants nationwide to receive a Therapeutic Arts Scholarship. Veterans are nominated for this scholarship by the staff at their VA facility and selected to attend the national festival based on therapeutic benefits. The scholarship allows recipients to participate in the six-day national festival with all lodging and meal expenses paid.

Simmons shared her enthusiasm for creative arts therapy just before heading out to Florida for the celebration.

Veterans interested in the Creative Arts Competition can contact Kelsey Eisenhauer, Creative Arts Therapist, at **410-642-2411, ext. 26191**.

- Q: What kind of benefits do you get from creative arts therapy?**
A: For me, its feeling like you belong—you belong to a community of friends. I also like the connections you make with the therapists—your therapist can help you identify things you need to work on and help you continue in a positive manner. And I like learning new skills, like playing the guitar.
- Q: What appeals to you about the Creative Arts Competition?**
A: A lot of times there are talents you don’t practice or utilize, but with this platform, it gets you motivated. It can lead you to work on things you haven’t done in years. And that helps at times when you are isolated. It occupies your mind and keeps you from the stinking thinking (aka negative thoughts). You have to get into your life and get out of your head!
- Q: How did you feel when you were selected to receive the scholarship to go to the national event and what are you most looking forward to?**
A: I was shocked, grateful and excited! I love that they thought I was worth it. I’m excited for the workshops and learning new things like how to publish, write music, write stories, make jewelry... these are skills I can bring home with me. And I really want to see everyone’s artwork to better understand where I can improve. And meeting people—being challenged to open up and meet new people, that’s a good thing!
- Q: What other activities do you participate in at the VA Maryland Health Care System?**
A: I was in a guitar group at the Loch Raven VA Medical Center, there’s KT [kinesiology], horticulture... I’ll be getting into occupational therapy soon. And there’s kayaking, golf, the Golden Age Games... I don’t want to miss anything! This is my family—the VA is taking care of me. I want to appreciate them, as much as they want to give me the opportunity to join these programs.
- Q: What do you want other Veterans to know about creative arts therapy?**
A: I tell them, once you get to know Kelsey [creative arts therapist], she’s the sweetest, most professional, nicest person you could meet. The whole team is great, but Kelsey is very knowledgeable and gives great advice. All you have to do is follow it, and it will improve your quality of life!

VA**HealthWatch****U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**Veterans Health Administration
VA Maryland Health Care SystemPublic & Community Relations (135)
10 N. Greene Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Published for the Veteran patients of the VA Maryland Health Care System. This newsletter is offered to provide reliable health information. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, which should be obtained directly from your health care provider. If you have questions or comments about **HealthWatch**, please call 410-605-7098.

A Member of the VA Capitol Health Care Network

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Important Phone Numbers

Please report a change of address to the Veterans Health Administration Call Center
Monday – Friday between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. at 877-222-8387 and press option 1.

Appointment Center:
410-605-7333**Automated Appointment Line:**
410-605-7395 (Press Option 1)**Beneficiary Travel**

- Baltimore VA Medical Center:
410-605-7318
- Perry Point VA Medical Center:
410-642-2411, ext. 26895

Billing Information:
866-393-0006**Burial Information & Benefits:**

- Baltimore National Cemetery:
410-644-9696
- State Veterans Cemeteries:
410-923-6981

Care in the Community:
410-642-2411, ext. 26924**Caregiver Support Program:**
410-605-7000, ext. 54143**Eligibility & Enrollment Center:**
410-605-7324**In-Network Urgent Care Providers:**
877-881-7618**Long-Term Care Information Line:**
410-642-1121**Medical Records/Release of Information:**

- Baltimore VA Medical Center:
410-605-7348
- Perry Point VA Medical Center:
410-642-2411, ext. 26028

My HealtheVet Coordinator:
410-605-7045**Patient Concerns & Compliments:**

- Baltimore VA Medical Center,
Baltimore VA Annex & Glen Burnie VA
Outpatient Clinic: 410-605-7099
- Perry Point VA Medical Center and
Cambridge & Pocomoke City VA
Outpatient Clinics:
410-642-2411, ext. 25097
- Loch Raven VA Medical Center and
Eastern Baltimore County & Fort Meade
VA Outpatient Clinic: 410-605-7542

Prescription Refill Line:
410-605-7395 (Press Option 2)**Returning Veterans (Transition and Care Management):** 410-605-7259**Telephone Care Line:** 800-865-2441**VA Benefits:**

- Veterans Benefits Information Line:
800-827-1000
- Maryland VA Service & Benefits Program:
800-446-4926, ext. 6450

VA Maryland Health Care System Facilities:

- Baltimore VA Medical Center:
410-605-7000
- Loch Raven VA Medical Center:
410-605-7000
- Perry Point VA Medical Center:
410-642-2411
- Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic:
410-228-6243
- Eastern Baltimore County VA
Outpatient Clinic: 443-730-2020
- Fort Meade VA Outpatient Clinic:
410-305-5300
- Glen Burnie VA Outpatient Clinic:
410-590-4140
- Loch Raven VA Outpatient Clinic:
410-605-7650
- Pocomoke City VA Outpatient Clinic:
410-957-6718

Vet Centers:

- Annapolis Vet Center: 410-605-7826
- Baltimore Vet Center: 410-764-9400
- Dundalk Vet Center: 410-282-6144
- Elkton Vet Center: 410-392-4485

Veterans Crisis Line:
988 - Press 1**Women Veterans Program:**
410-605-7275**CLIP AND SAVE**