

A Message from the Director



Whether you're entering a new chapter in life, looking to do things differently, or just feeling bored, it helps to have a fresh perspective. For Veterans who have been using VA health care for many years and for those Veterans who are new to our health care system, now is a great time to take another look at what the VA Maryland Health Care System has to offer. This

edition of HealthWatch provides a fresh look at the comprehensive array of health care services available to

serve Maryland's Veterans, including more services for Veterans who are new mothers, volunteer opportunities to support Veteran patients, the PACT Act, and new ways to treat pain.

You've earned the care that is available to you from our health care system, so I encourage you take 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)

The PACT Act and what you need to know

Named in honor of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, a decorated combat medic who died from a rare form of lung cancer, the PACT Act is a historic new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances during service. This new law empowers VA to provide generations of Veterans – and their survivors – with the care and benefits they have earned.

The Act (1) expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam era, Gulf War era and Post-9/11 era, and (2) expands eligibility for benefits for Veterans exposed to toxic substances.

PACT Act key components:

- 1** VA will improve the decision-making process for determining what medical conditions will be considered for presumptive status.
- 2** *Every enrolled Veteran will receive an initial toxic exposure screening and a follow-up screening every five years. Veterans who are not

enrolled, but who are eligible to enroll will have an opportunity to enroll and receive the screening.

- 3** VA health care staff and claims processors will receive toxic exposure-related education and training.
- 4** The Act requires research studies on mortality of Veterans who served in Southwest Asia during the Gulf War, Post-9/11 Veteran health trends, and Veteran cancer rates.
- 5** The Act will help VA build a stronger, more skilled workforce to meet the growing demands for benefits and services.
- 6** The Act authorizes 31 new medical facilities across the country, providing greater access to VA health care.

** Veterans enrolled in the VA Maryland Health Care System will not need to schedule an appointment for toxic-exposure screening. The screening will occur during a regularly scheduled primary care appointment.*

The PACT Act and what you need to know Continued From Previous Page

How can a Veteran file a claim?

Veterans who would like to file a claim must complete VA Form 21-526EZ to apply for benefits and submit any supportive evidence.

To learn how to file a VA disability claim, visit:
www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/.

For assistance filing a claim, contact the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Service and Benefits Program at 800-446-4926, ext. 6450.

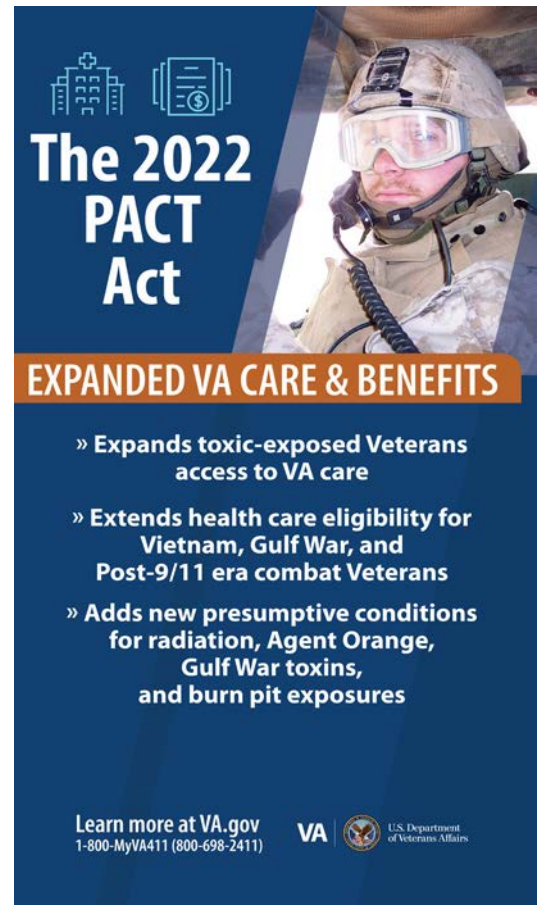
How can Veterans apply for VA health care?

Apply online at www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application.

Call 877-222-8387 Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Learn more about the PACT Act

Visit www.va.gov/PACT to get the latest information and updates about the PACT Act.



The 2022 PACT Act

EXPANDED VA CARE & BENEFITS

- » Expands toxic-exposed Veterans access to VA care
- » Extends health care eligibility for Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 era combat Veterans
- » Adds new presumptive conditions for radiation, Agent Orange, Gulf War toxins, and burn pit exposures

Learn more at VA.gov
1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411)

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Keep your health information within your reach, but away from others



Simon Doquang, RN,
the My HealtheVet
Coordinator

My HealtheVet makes it easy for Veterans to access their health care information online, no matter where they are or what time it is. That convenience comes with a caution, but VA is committed to keeping information safe and secure. A My HealtheVet premium account now offers the option to set up multifactor authentication. This means Veterans take an additional step at log in (like entering a code that is emailed to them) to prove they are the appropriate person accessing the account.

Multifactor authentication lets Veterans in, while keeping hackers out.

If you aren't already using My HealtheVet, Simon Doquang, RN, the My HealtheVet Coordinator for the VA Maryland Health Care System, can help you register for an account.

"I strongly recommend all Veterans register with My HealtheVet," he said. "It allows Veterans to communicate with their providers, access their medical records, view labs/tests and medications, manage VA benefits, and much more."

Get started by visiting www.myhealth.va.gov and clicking on "Register." If you need help, call Simon at 410-605-7045.



SIGN UP

for a class or join a group

There's something for everyone,
and it's all **FREE!**



From meditation for mindfulness to axe throwing—and everything in between—Veterans looking for activities to help them achieve their personal wellness goals and learn new skills can find them at the VA Maryland Health Care System.

The Recreation and Creative Arts Therapy team is coordinating an array of outpatient clinics and workshops for all enrolled Veterans. It's an opportunity to discover adaptive sports, dabble in something exciting like axe throwing, learn a new skill like woodburning, or refine artistic talents in the art studio. Activities are held onsite at VA facilities and at locations in the community.

Before participating in any offerings, Veterans will be pre-screened by Recreation and Creative Arts Therapy staff. Once pre-screened, Veterans can check the quarterly calendar and are welcome to register for any events and programs that interest them. There's no cost or commitment.

To get started, call Kelsey Eisenhauer (Creative Arts)
at **410-585-4477**

or

Lauren Buckingham (Adaptive Sports)
at **410-642-2411**, ext. 22917.

The Recovery Center offers in-person, virtual and hybrid groups focusing on alternative and complementary treatments for Veterans interested in holistic wellness. While not a physical center that Veterans can visit for individual services, the name comes from the focus on helping Veterans address any type of issue they may be facing. "The emphasis on recovery is because we aim to empower Veterans to work toward their individual recovery goals, whatever they might be," explained Recovery Center psychologist Christina Thai, PhD.

Veterans can call Dr. Thai at 443-897-2388 or ask their VA health care provider to enter a consult for the Recovery Center.

Veterans will need to complete a virtual orientation through VA Video Connect prior to joining any of the groups. The orientation is held multiple times each week in a group format and lasts about 45 minutes. After the orientation, Veterans can choose from more than 30 groups held in person at the Perry Point VA Medical Center and virtually through VA Video Connect. Groups focus on a variety of topics, including mindfulness, stress management, chronic pain management, yoga, Tai Chi, music therapy, and spirituality.

Have you had the “talk” yet?

Getting Your Affairs in Order with **Advance Care Planning**



Having conversations about your health care wishes ensures that your providers are aware of your unique values and health care goals. Would you want aggressive medical treatment regardless of the circumstances, or would this depend on whether you have a progressive or terminal condition that cannot be cured? If you were bed ridden with dementia and unable to swallow or communicate coherently, would you want a feeding tube surgically placed? Individuals may have different answers to these types of questions, and different ideas about their quality of life.

Conversations alone are not enough: your wishes should be recorded accurately, using “advance care planning documentation.” This documentation can eliminate confusion and conflict over treatment plans and can give your loved ones and health care providers a vital road map that guides treatment decisions. Your family members may be relieved of stressful decision-making burdens during periods of severe illness.

The following types of advance care planning documentation can be completed at any time:

- 1 Advance Directive** – is a legal form that helps your providers and loved ones know your wishes about your health care. A VA social worker can assist you with completing an Advance Directive. The “Living Will” section of the Advance Directive indicates general treatment preferences in certain conditions. Another section enables you to formally designate a health care agent to make health care decisions on your behalf if you lose the ability to do so.
- 2 Life Sustaining Treatment (LST) note** – promotes personalized, proactive, patient-driven care for Veterans by documenting your values, goals, and preferences. An LST note can be completed by a VA provider to clarify your wishes regarding life sustaining treatments that can save or maintain life, such as a blood transfusion, dialysis, feeding tubes, mechanical ventilation, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). It is signed by the provider (after getting your permission) and remains in a constant location within your electronic medical record. You can request a print-out of your LST note at any time. This request does not need to go through the Medical Records section.

Do the right thing for yourself and for your loved ones: it's never too early to have the talk!

Get Your Toxic Exposure Screening

Who: All Veterans enrolled in VA health care

What: A quick, 5-10 minute screening to identify and document any potential exposures to toxins during military service

When: At least once every 5 years

Where: At VA medical centers and clinics

Why: To support your long-term health plan and ensure you receive informed, whole-health care

How: Ask about the toxic exposure screening at your next VA appointment.



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;
- 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. 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 “8” to talk with the Pharmacy Call Center and a VA staff member will help notify your provider of your request for a medication renewal.

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.

New Pharmacy Apps!

Ask a Pharmacist

- Access information about VA pharmacies and medications easily from trusted sources.
- Learn about prescription refill and pharmacy services, including the ability to refill and track your VA prescriptions.
- Learn how to read a prescription label and *identify pills by sight*.
- Access reliable, VA-approved resources about types of drugs as well as administering and disposing of medications.
- Available for iOS, Android and Windows operating systems.

Rx Refill App

- > **Request** refills for refillable VA-issued prescriptions.
- > **Scan** VA prescriptions to access prescription information.
- > **Track** VA prescription deliveries.
- > **View** VA prescription history.

Contains links to the My HealtheVet website. Available for download on iOS or Android devices.

To use Rx Refill App, you must have **ID.me, DS Logon Level 2 (Premium) or a My HealtheVet Premium account.**

Veterans Regain Hearing with State-of-the Art Treatment Options



Veteran patient and volunteer Nathaniel Thomas (pictured with Dr. Julia Delong) regained his hearing after cochlear implant surgery.

For Marine Veteran Jeremy Hernandez, 48, constantly asking his family and colleagues to repeat themselves felt stressful and created tension as it became increasingly clear he couldn't hear. As his hearing issues grew worse—a problem from his military time — it took a greater toll as he began experiencing pseudo-auditory hallucinations, a side effect of tinnitus and hearing loss that resulted in losing his job in a field where hearing is imperative. But Hernandez avoided talking to anyone about it, fearing they would say he was crazy.

"I resisted going to the VA because I wasn't sure it would actually help, and the negative publicity about VA scared me," Hernandez said.

Then his community provider learned he was a Veteran and suggested he check out the VA Audiology Clinic, citing it as one of the best. Hernandez applied for **VA health care**, and made an appointment. "I was shocked. I received top-of-the-line care and hearing aids with the latest technology that works with my phone, something I couldn't afford on my own," he said. "Plus, Dr. Delong calibrated my hearing aids to my individual hearing level and needs."

The Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic at the **VA Maryland Health Care System** assesses the needs of Veterans with an array of hearing impairments and provides each with individual care. "Hearing impairment is different in every Veteran and may require different treatments based on the level of hearing loss," said Dr. Julia Delong, staff audiologist. "We personalize every Veteran's care to their level of hearing loss and unique needs."

This is especially true for Air Force and Army Veteran Nathaniel Thomas, 80, an avid swimmer, who has received his care at the VA Maryland Health Care System since his retirement from the Army. Thomas was in the Army when an ear infection caused by bacteria in the pool interfered with his hearing. At first, he and his doctors thought it would clear up, but it didn't. "When the testing revealed I was totally deaf, that's when I broke down and cried because I knew I'd never hear the sounds of the world again—like birds chirping," said Thomas.

His VA doctors presented a different plan—the cochlear implant surgery. "I took a weekend to decide if I wanted this surgery, and it came down to if I wanted to live my life the way it was without hearing anything or if I wanted to take a chance on the surgery?"

The surgery sounded scary, but Thomas took the chance and found that the cochlear implant changed his life.

"It was the best decision I made," he said. Thomas now volunteers in the Audiology Clinic to help other Veterans undergoing treatment for hearing loss. "I am so grateful to be able to hear. Volunteering is what I can do to give back," he said.

The cochlear implant is one of the specialty services provided for Veterans with profound hearing loss and who agree to participate in the treatment and rehabilitation protocols.



Cochlear implant (example)

Are you hearing ringing, buzzing, roaring, or clicking in one or both ears?

Hearing impairment in adults can range from mild to profound and is a common problem. Caused by loud noises, aging, disease, and genetic variations, hearing loss makes it challenging to have conversations with family and friends. It also includes a condition called tinnitus—hearing ringing, buzzing, roaring, clicking, hissing, humming, or other noises in one or both ears not caused by external sounds. It is especially common in older adults, but also is occurring in younger Veterans. Although tinnitus is a symptom of hearing loss, it does not actually impact hearing ability. It can be continuous or come and go. Tinnitus can happen in people who do not experience hearing loss but see a doctor if it disrupts daily living.

To assess hearing impairment, Dr. John Koslowski, Chief of Audiology and Speech Pathology, and the Audiology team use diagnostic tests to determine and discuss the results with patients and their families and the best treatment options available, including hearing aids, personal amplifiers, assistive technologies, and cochlear implants.

"Today everyone has things in their ears—ear buds and headphones—so the stigma of wearing hearing aids has diminished," said Koslowski. "We have state-of-the-art hearing aids that are connected to people's smart phones. The advanced technology has been a game changer."

To schedule an appointment at one of six Audiology Clinics throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System, Veterans should call the Appointment Center at **410-605-7333**. No referral is required.

COMPACT Act

Increased access to immediate suicide prevention care



VA has enacted more convenient ways to assist Veterans in suicidal crisis. As of January 17, 2023, a Veteran in suicidal crisis can go to any health care facility, at VA or in the community, for free emergency health care. This new effort to prevent Veteran suicide is thanks to the Veterans Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment (COMPACT) Act of 2020. Veterans do not need to be enrolled in the VA system to use this benefit.

This expansion of care will help to prevent Veteran suicide by guaranteeing no cost, world-class care to Veterans in times of a crisis. It will also increase access to acute suicide care for up to 9 million Veteran who are not currently enrolled in VA.

The COMPACT Act includes:

- Free emergency health care for Veterans in crisis.
- Transportation costs.
- Inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days.
- Outpatient care for up to 90 days, including social work.

COMPACT Eligibility

(regardless of VA enrollment status):

- Veterans who were discharged or released from active duty after more than 24 months of active service under conditions other than dishonorable.
- Former members of the armed forces, including reserve service members, who served more than 100 days under a combat exclusion or in support of a contingency operation either directly or by operating an unmanned aerial vehicle from another location discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.
- Former members of the armed forces who were the victim of a physical assault of a sexual nature, a battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment while serving in the armed forces.

For more information, visit our COMPACT Act website at <https://tinyurl.com/4f5k2yca>.

988: Veterans Crisis Line Made Easier

The Veterans Crisis Line's new number – 988 then Press 1 – helps make it easier for Veterans and those who care for them to reach lifesaving support. While Dial 988 then Press 1 is a new option for contacting the Veterans Crisis Line, the original number: 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, remains available, and Veterans can continue reach out via chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat or by text to 838255.

Weapons Safety for Suicide Prevention

For many Veterans in crisis, the thought of suicide can sometimes be brief. The time it takes to access secured weapons could be the precious time needed to detract from a suicidal impulse. Take advantage of simple ways to keep weapons safe. They can be locked with a simple cable lock or stored in a lockbox or a gun safe.

If you have guns at home and want to secure them, VA can help. Ask your Primary Care team or Mental Health provider at your next VA appointment for a free gun lock.
For more tips on secure storage, visit www.va.gov/reach/lethal-means/.

Lactation Pods **Now** Available Throughout VA Maryland Health Care System

As recently as two decades ago, the presence of lactation pods for nursing mothers at a VA medical center seemed as likely as a Jetsons-style video chat but now both are a reality. Lactation stations—referred to as lactation pods—are free standing spaces with an app-enabled entry that allow nursing mothers to feed their babies or pump their breast milk in privacy. And now, the VA Maryland Health Care System has secured five lactation pods to be available at its three inpatient facilities for women Veterans and employees who are new mothers.

“We’re excited to have these lactation pods in our facilities,” said Siobhan Kirksey, Program Manager for the Women Veterans Health Program at the VA Maryland Health Care System. “We have a growing number of women Veterans who are having babies, and a robust maternity program for our women Veterans. This is a great way to welcome them when they come to the VA with their babies.”

Veterans who are new mothers can download the Mamava app which tells them where the pods are located and unlocks the space for them to use. It also tells them if the pods are vacant or in use.



Lactation pods have now been placed at the Baltimore, Loch Raven and Perry Point VA Medical Centers, enabling the growing number of women Veterans to nurse their babies or pump milk in private.

Blood Draw Lab Changes

Veteran patients no longer need to make an appointment at the Blood Draw Lab at either the Baltimore or Perry Point VA Medical Centers. Patients can now walk in to have their blood drawn at both locations, if the lab orders from their VA provider are in the system for the appropriate specimen collection.

This change only applies to the Blood Draw Labs at the Baltimore and Perry Point VA Medical Centers.

BLOOD DRAW LAB HOURS:

Baltimore VA Medical Center:
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Perry Point VA Medical Center:
Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Stroke Care

Treating Strokes in Record Time



A stroke is a medical emergency that can happen suddenly at any time. Within seconds, blocked blood flow to the brain causes a rapid onset of symptoms that—without fast treatment—can lead to permanent disability and even death.

Stroke, the fifth leading cause of death in the U.S., is the most common cause of disabilities, which makes recognizing the signs of stroke and seeking immediate treatment imperative. Recognizing the signs of stroke and calling 9-1-1 to get to the hospital could make a huge difference in treatment. But then, how fast does one get treatment after arriving at the hospital? When it comes to stroke treatment—time is brain. The faster the treatment, the more likely to minimize the damage to the brain.

What is the VA Maryland Health Care System doing to beat the clock for stroke treatment?

First, clinicians tested themselves last December through a daylong simulation training to make sure that both inpatients and outpatients presenting with stroke symptoms to the Emergency Department (ED) and in the Intensive Care Units (ICU) at the Baltimore VA Medical Center received treatment in less than 60 minutes.

“Stroke patients have a greater chance of surviving and avoiding long-term brain damage if they arrive at the hospital and receive treatment within the first hour,” said Dr. Sandra Marshall, Chief of Staff at the VA Maryland Health Care System. “We are always working to improve the care we provide our patients, and this simulation allows us to learn more about our processes to see what a best practice is and what needs to be fine-tuned.”

Second, following the simulation, clinicians successfully implemented the VA Telestroke program, a national VA program helping the Baltimore VA Medical Center treat acute stroke patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week by allowing clinical staff to coordinate with a neurologist via FaceTime within five minutes of a patient presenting with acute stroke symptoms. The Telestroke neurologist then collaborates with the nursing staff to safely deliver stroke treatment medications within 45 minutes of presentation.

Third, during the simulation, clinicians updated the workflow for both the ED and the ICU to ensure Veterans can quickly receive care and admission to the medical center. Also, ED and ICU nurses are trained monthly through ongoing sessions with the National Telestroke Program team for updates in protocol. “The most important thing for Veterans to know is that if they are feeling the symptoms of stroke to tell someone right away—a nurse if you are in the hospital, or call 911 if you’re at home,” said

Jackqueline Easley, MSN, RN, Nurse Educator for Primary Care and the ED at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. “VA is equipped with up-to-date technology and our ED and ICU nurses are trained on the administration of medications to treat stroke.”

Identifying the kind of stroke and providing treatment within the shortest length of time can make a huge difference in patient outcomes. During a stroke, every second matters! By knowing the signs and symptoms of stroke, Veterans or their families can take quick action to save a life.

Act F.A.S.T.

According to the **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)**, the following are the signs of stroke:

- Sudden **numbness** or weakness in the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden **confusion**, trouble speaking, or difficulty understanding speech.
- Sudden **trouble seeing** in one or both eyes.
- Sudden **trouble walking**, dizziness, loss of balance, or lack of coordination.
- Sudden **severe headache** with no known cause.

Call 9-1-1 right away if you or someone else has any of these symptoms.

If you think someone may be having a stroke, act **F.A.S.T** and use the following test:

F—Face: Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

A—Arms: Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S—Speech: Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is the speech slurred or strange?

T—Time: If you see any of these signs, call 9-1-1 right away.

Note the time when any symptoms first appear. This information helps health care providers determine the best treatment for each person.

Do not drive to the hospital or let someone else drive you. Call 9-1-1 for an ambulance so medical personnel can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the emergency room.

Veterans serving Veterans



Are you looking for something interesting and fun to do while also giving back to others? The volunteer program throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System is back in full swing following the COVID-19 pandemic and Veterans

are leading the way in filling many of the volunteer assignments. Of the roughly 200 men and women who currently contribute their time, more than half are Veterans.

“There’s a special mindset of those who have served our country,” says Susan Kern, Program Manager for the Center for Development and Civic Engagement (formerly Voluntary Service) at the VA Maryland Health Care System. “Even when they leave the military, they want to continue their service, and what better way to do it than by helping their fellow Veterans?”

“Many family members of Veterans enjoy giving back in honor or memory of their loved ones who served in the armed forces,” she added. That’s not to say you must be a Veteran to volunteer. “We invite all community members to consider applying to become a VA volunteer,” Kern said. “We have a variety of roles, in both clinical and administrative settings, and we can match you with a role based on your skills, interests and availability. Regardless of what you do, volunteering is a fulfilling opportunity to give back to Veterans.”

To be eligible, potential volunteers must commit to 100 hours of service. Additionally, individuals are required to complete a volunteer application, a health screening, and a background check. To the right are some of the current volunteer opportunities.



RED COAT AMBASSADORS:

Greet fellow Veterans as they arrive for clinic appointments

Baltimore and Perry Point VA Medical Centers

YOGA AND TAI CHI INSTRUCTORS:

Help Veterans discover holistic healing through Yoga and Tai Chi

Perry Point VA Medical Center

RECREATION ASSISTANTS:

Accompany residential patients on field trips

Loch Raven and Perry Point VA Medical Centers

CHAPEL ESCORTS:

Escort residential patients to and from Chapel services

Loch Raven and Perry Point VA Medical Centers

DRIVERS:

Drive outpatients to and from VA clinic appointments

Baltimore, Loch Raven & Perry Point VA Medical Centers

TRANSPORTATION COORDINATORS:

Schedule volunteer drivers and outpatients for transportation to clinic appointments

Glen Burnie VA Outpatient Clinic

SHUTTLE DRIVERS:

Drive a patient shuttle from the Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic to the Perry Point VA Medical Center and back again

Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic

PATIENT ESCORTS:

Transport patients to and from clinics and treatment areas

Baltimore VA Medical Center

If you would like to apply to be a VA volunteer,
call 410-605-7100

or

visit our Become a Volunteer page at
<https://tinyurl.com/2y9wsedb>.

NEWS & UPDATES

▶ Experiencing a Medical Emergency?

In a medical emergency, it's important to go to the nearest hospital emergency department to get the help you need as soon as possible. Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system **don't need to check with VA first, but they should call the VA Emergency Care Notification Call Center at 844-724-7842 within 72 hours of arriving at a non-VA facility.** This will help facilitate access to VA for care coordination, eligibility determination and payment authorization. If you are unable to make the call yourself, your family member, representative or ED provider can do it on your behalf.

▶ Apply Online for Travel Reimbursement

Beneficiary travel claims can now be submitted online through the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System. **This electronic system makes it convenient for Veterans or their designated caregiver to submit a claim online and helps speed up reimbursement.** To find out if you are eligible, visit the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System site at <https://tinyurl.com/4he2pahf> and then click "Access VA" and select the Veteran Travel Claim Entry icon to get started. You will then be able to choose to log on using a DS-Logon Level 2 account, with a VA PIV card, with ID.me or with your My HealtheVet credentials.

Effective: June 9, 2023

Eligible Veterans must resume submitting their claim for travel reimbursement within 30 days of their VA medical appointment.

▶ Apply Online for Medical Debt Relief

For Veterans with VA medical copayment debt they cannot pay, debt relief options such as repayment plans, waivers and compromises are available. VA has simplified the application process and created a new debt access webpage to allow Veterans better access to the help they might need. Go to www.va.gov/manage-va-debt/ and log into your VA account using My HealtheVet or another secure VA Partner to get started. The site also provides access to VA benefits-related debt, billing statements and other debt-related correspondence. Veterans can still apply for debt relief in person at the Baltimore or Perry Point VA Medical Center or by calling the Health Resource Center at 866-400-1238.

▶ Request a New Veteran Health ID Online

Until recently, Veterans wanting to request a new Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC) were required to go to designated VA medical centers. That's no longer necessary. Using a new self-service app, Veterans can apply online and upload a digital color photo of themselves along with a copy of their current photo ID. Go to <https://tinyurl.com/25nad33p> and log in using My HealtheVet or another secure VA Partner to complete the process.



Veteran ID Cards: Know the Difference

▶ A **Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)** is available to Veterans who are enrolled for VA health care. It is used as proof of identity and to check-in for VA health care appointments. The VHIC is not required to receive health care since Veterans can instead show a valid government-issued photo ID, like a driver's license to check in. Veterans can apply for a VHIC in person by visiting the Enrollment Center at the Baltimore or the Admission Office at the Perry Point VA Medical Centers or they can apply online at <https://eauth.va.gov/accessva/?cspSelectFor=vhic-ss>.

▶ A **Veteran Identification Card (VIC)** is a digital photo ID that can be used to get discounts for Veterans at many stores, businesses, and restaurants. You are eligible to receive a VIC if you served on active duty, in the Reserves, or in the National Guard (including the Coast Guard) and you received an honorable or general discharge (under honorable conditions). Veterans can apply for a VIC online at <https://www.va.gov/records/get-veteran-id-cards/vic/>.

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**Emergency Notification Call Center:**
844-724-7842**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**