

MINNEAPOLIS VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Member Handbook: Veterans Bridge to Recovery (VBR)

Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center

Updated
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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Minneapolis VA Health Care System

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WELCOME!

We're glad you are joining the Veterans Bridge to Recovery (VBR) program. We hope your time with us will be rewarding. We want to work with you to create a positive and encouraging environment to reach your recovery goals.

RECOVERY

Recovery is defining your life and pursuing your goals even with the challenge of mental illness. Recovery means developing a new sense of meaning and purpose beyond the effects of mental illness. Recovery is different for everyone. Here are a few thoughts on recovery from VBR members and staff:

Recovery is:

...taking one day at a time. --Russ W.

...finding our strengths.—Steve F. and Pat K.

...staying on task.

...at our own pace. --Tim D.

...a wave and not a line.

...doing positive things.

...trying something different and getting different results.—John R.

...being sober.

...possible.

...a challenge worth taking! – Ben F.

...developing the best version of yourself. – Ben F.

...stockpiling tools. – Tim R



Another Veteran added:

“Attitude is a little thing that makes a BIG difference.”

VBR MISSION STATEMENT

- “Working together toward recovery and community integration.”
- Programs like VBR have been started in many VA medical centers. They are:
 - transitional educational centers.
 - places that instill hope, validate strengths, teach skills, and facilitate community integration.
- The goal of programs like VBR is to offer Veterans experiencing serious mental illnesses an opportunity to:
 - Define and pursue their vision of their future.
 - More fully integrate into the community of their choice.
 - Learn skills and access services and supports needed for recovery and community integration.

LOCATION AND HOURS OF OPERATION

- VA Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) located at:
 - 1201 Harmon Place, Minneapolis, MN 55403
- Program hours: Monday-Friday 0830-1600
- Building hours: Monday-Friday 0700-1700

IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Main CRRC number 612-313-3240
- Dr. Martina Rodgers, VBR Program Manager 612-313-3286
- Michelle Kelly, Certified Peer Specialist 651-347-3616
- Recovery Coaches:
 - Ben Fischer, LICSW 651-230-2132
 - Dr. Martina Rodgers 612-313-3286
 - Karey Mason, RN 651-373-5591
- *For after-hours assistance:*
 - EMERGENCIES: Call 911
 - URGENT: Call 612-725-2000 and ask for the psychiatrist on duty or
Call the Veterans Crisis Line at 988 OR 1-800-273-8255 and press 1
Text the Veterans Crisis Line at 838255
 - NON-urgent: Leave a voicemail message on the CRRC voicemail or with your coach

VBR STAFF

- Strive to create a healthy, encouraging, and supportive community.
- Are committed to providing ethical care in accord with the standards of their professional disciplines and our VBR program code of ethics.
- Will work with you to help you define your personal vision of recovery.
- Will work with your outpatient mental health providers.
- Will work with your family members and/or other supporters if you want them involved in your care.

Program Manager/Psychologist: Dr. Martina Rodgers

Martina oversees the VBR program. She ensures that VBR maintains its accreditation, and she conducts outcome evaluations to ensure VBR is helping members. Martina also manages consults to the program, conducts informational and screening meetings, teaches educational and skills classes, conducts intake assessments, and engages members in recovery coaching sessions. She accompanies Veterans during community integration activities.

Nurse: Karey Mason, RN

Karey conducts the wellness assessments for all veterans in the program. She provides recovery coaching sessions and teaches educational and skills classes. She also accompanies Veterans on trips into the community.

Social worker: Ben Fischer, LICSW

Ben is a VBR Recovery Coach who completes intake assessments, facilitates Whole Health & Mind Body skills groups, and supports Veterans with community integration goals. Ben is a VA Whole Health Integration Champion for Mental Health. His certifications include biofeedback, breathwork, guided imagery, and as a Mind Body Skills Group facilitator. He also has two education certificates training in Emotional Freedom Techniques (Tapping).

Peer support: Michelle Kelly, CPS

Peer Support staff provide support, hope, encouragement, and positive role modeling by sharing their personal mental health recovery stories and experiences. Peer Support Workers lead groups and talk with members one on one. They also accompany veterans on trips into the community.

Recovery Coaches:

Your recovery coach will be your primary staff contact at VBR. They will help you develop your Recovery Plan. Your coach can help you think about your goals, break goals down into specific steps, identify resources, and solve problems. They have information about resources and can help you think through your goals and how to reach them. They will also help you create a plan for how and when you will transition to senior membership in VBR. You can meet with them at VBR or in the community.

VBR PHASES OF PARTICIPATION

**PHASE 1: (6-12 months)
ACTIVELY LEARNING
AND CONNECTING**



- Complete 30-day Trial Period
- Required to attend at least 2 of the educational groups each week on Mon, Tues & Thurs
 - Whole Health
 - Resiliency
 - Social Skills
 - Self-Compassion
 - Fake It 'til You Make It
- May attend any additional groups
- Individual coaching session at least 1x per month
- Create Recovery Plan
- Peer Support as needed

**PHASE 2: (3-6 months)
TRANSITIONING INTO
THE COMMUNITY**



- May attend Wednesday and Friday groups
- Other optional groups
 - Women's Only Peer Support Group
 - Breathe With Ben
 - Tap Away Your Stress
 - Let's Talk Books
 - Community Integration Groups
- Individual coaching at least 1x per month
- Peer Support as needed

PHASE 3: GRADUATION



- May attend Community Meeting on Wed
- Other optional groups
 - Graduate Group
 - Women's Only Peer Group
 - Breathe With Ben
 - Tap Away Your Stress
- Graduate Speaker Series

ADMISSION CRITERIA (WHO CAN PARTICIPATE)

- Veterans have a diagnosis of a serious mental illness (i.e., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, severe PTSD, recurrent and severe depression, or schizoaffective disorder).
- Veterans have difficulties functioning in their community of choice (e.g., serious symptoms that interfere with daily living and/or difficulty maintaining a job, social network, or participating in school).
- Veterans have a primary mental health team outside of VBR.
- Veterans have the desire to make changes in their lives.
- Veterans are willing and able to learn new skills and work toward goals.
- Veterans with a history of violence or other behaviors that would endanger a milieu-based treatment program may not be allowed to join.

COSTS

- VBR is considered a basic service. If you have a copayment for services, you may be charged for each day that you use VBR services. If you do not know whether you have a copayment, you can contact the Means Test office by phone at 612-467-2022 or in person at room 1S-144 (near the Cashier). You can also contact the Patient Advocates by phone at 612-467-2106 or in person at room 4M-101.
- For additional information on costs of VA services, see this website: <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/cost/>
- Some program-related activities require travel via public transit and/or admission fees to local attractions. If you choose to attend these activities you may need to pay your own way. Information about cost will be posted on sign-up sheets and the program calendar.

REFERRAL AND INTAKE PROCESS

- Veterans or their mental health providers can refer to the VBR program by calling the Program Manager at 612-313-3286 or placing a consult in the VA chart system.
- After a Veteran is referred, the Program Manager will review the Veteran's medical record to ensure the Veteran meets admission criteria (see previous section for admission criteria).
- The Program Manager may speak with the Veteran and/or the referring provider to gather more information about the Veteran and assess whether VBR fits the Veteran's needs.
 - If VBR does not appear to be a good fit, the Program Manager will talk with the Veteran and/or the referring provider about other services in the community or at the VA that might better fit the Veteran's needs.
 - VBR Staff will also assess if the Veteran would like to attend VBR groups via video or in person.
- The Veteran will first meet with the VBR staff for an orientation meeting. During the orientation meeting, staff will review the program mission, procedures, logistics, and other relevant information.
- If VBR appears to be a good fit, the VBR staff will offer the Veteran a trial period. Veterans typically attend up to 4-5 weeks of VBR programming during the trial period. During this time, the Veteran and staff will be evaluating the fit between Veteran needs, goals, behavior, and programming. Veterans are required to attend at least 2 skills days (Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays) per week during this time and are encouraged to attend other days of the week as well.
- Upon successfully completing the trial period, the Veteran will be invited to an intake appointment.
 - This appointment takes approximately 2 hours and involves answering questions about your history, goals, strengths, and problems as well as reviewing information about the VBR program. The Veteran may share his/her/their preference for the assigned coach.
- Following the intake appointment, the Veteran will meet with the nurse for a health and wellness assessment.
- The Veteran's coach will schedule an initial Recovery Planning meeting during the intake process.
 - The Veteran and coach will work together to complete the initial Recovery Plan within 30 days of the intake appointment.
 - The Veteran and coach will update the Recovery Plan as indicated and no later than 1 year. The Recovery Plan will also be updated as the Veteran

transitions to Phase 2. The Veteran and coach will meet at least once per month to discuss progress on goals.

- Veterans will likely have questions as they begin attending VBR. Please ask questions when you have them. Staff and/or other members can answer questions.

VBR SERVICES, ACTIVITIES, AND CLASSES

VBR services include individual coaching sessions and/or individual peer support, community meetings, educational and skills groups, peer support groups, social hour and games groups, guest speakers, and individual or group community integration outings. We emphasize group participation and socialization among Veterans. A monthly calendar is available for members. The calendar lists upcoming activities and should be used to help you plan when you want to participate. The calendar and this handbook are also available online ([Veterans Bridge To Recovery | VA Minneapolis Health Care | Veterans Affairs](#)).

Individual services:

- Each Veteran will be assigned a Recovery Coach and will meet individually with the coach to develop a personalized Recovery Plan.
 - Veterans are expected to:
 - generate personal goals for the Recovery Plan
 - actively pursue recovery by working on Recovery Plan goals at VBR and on his/her/their own time
 - meet regularly with his/her/their coach to talk about goals and progress
 - Coaches are expected to assist the Veteran with:
 - Clarifying SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, Time-based)
 - Identifying 1-2 goals to serve as the focus of the Recovery Plan
 - Breaking goals down into steps the Veteran needs to take in order to achieve goals
 - Identifying VA and non-VA resources the Veteran may need to achieve goals
 - Identifying personal strengths and barriers to achieving goals
 - Identifying ways to participate more in the Veteran's community
 - Veterans will meet with his/her/their Recovery Coaches at scheduled appointments (at least once per month) to review progress toward goals, learn about resources, review skills, and complete NEPEC paperwork.
 - Coaches and Veterans can meet at the CRRC, over video, or in the community.
- Each Veteran will meet with the nurse who will do a health and wellness assessment and provide information about health-related resources.

Daily group activities:

Community Meeting and Weekend Updates: introductions for members, goal-setting, progress updates, announcements, weekend updates and weekend planning, awards and recognitions.

Skills and Education: VBR staff offer a variety of skills and education groups typically based on the VBR core curriculum below. There are different groups designed for Veterans in Phase 1, Phase 2, and Graduate Phase. During the intake, Veterans and staff review and discuss which groups would best suit the Veteran's personal recovery. Guest presenters are often scheduled monthly to present on a variety of subjects.

Peer/Social Groups and Other Activities: On Fridays (as well as other days of the week on occasion), peer support and social groups are offered. These groups are more unstructured and offer the members a unique opportunity to discuss current issues and events relevant to their recovery. Show and Tell and Life Stories are also scheduled as groups to allow Veterans to share various information about themselves while creating connections with peers. Games, such as trivia and bingo, have also been scheduled. VBR groups and activities occasionally take place in the community.

VBR Core Curriculum

- **Whole Health:** This topic is offered on a weekly basis throughout the year and covers the following topics: Mindful Awareness, Power of the Mind, Food and Drink, Working the Body, Recharge, Spirit and Soul, Personal Development, Family/Friends/Co-workers/Neighbors, and Surroundings.
- **Resiliency:** This topic is offered on a weekly basis throughout the year. The group focuses on various reflection exercises, discussion questions, and other activities that are designed to improve resiliency, increase positive feelings and thoughts, and provide information about various positive psychology techniques and coping skills.
- **Social Skills:** This topic is offered for four months out of the year. It is based upon the evidence-based therapy called Social Skills Training. It uses the principles of behavior therapy to teach communication skills, conversation skills, and assertiveness skills. This group incorporates modeling, role plays, and other learning activities.
- **Self-Compassion:** This topic is offered for four months out of the year. Self-compassion is the ability to turn understanding, acceptance, and love toward oneself and includes a focus on self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity. This group teaches various skills and exercises that help develop compassion for the self.
- **Fake It 'til You Make It:** This topic is offered for four months out of the year. It is based upon the evidence-based therapy called Acceptance and Commitment

Therapy. The group focuses upon engaging members in simple and powerful group exercises that foster hope and enable action today towards living a more satisfying life.

- Mind Body Practices: These integrative practices include a variety of procedures or techniques that support the wellbeing of the whole person. The mind body connection refers to how the brain and thoughts influence the body and its functions.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

VBR member-initiated outings and social gatherings: Examples include a weekly breakfast at Day By Day Café in St Paul and occasional cookouts and gatherings at members' residences.

Community integration trips: Trips into the community to enhance skills and enjoy some of the Twin Cities' many cultural and recreational offerings are an important part of the VBR mission. Veterans select and plan all community outings.

Volunteerism: Many members are interested in volunteering. We have occasional trips focused on providing services to people in need (e.g., packing meals at Save My Starving Children, packing food boxes for Second Harvest Heartland).

OTHER SERVICES AVAILABLE TO VBR MEMBERS

VBR members have access to a variety of VA mental health and physical health services. Coaches can work with Veterans to identify services in the healthcare system that fit needs and goals. Additional services include but are not limited to:

- [] Referral for cognitive testing (Dr. Bridget Hegeman of Team Z)
- [] Cognitive Behavioral Social Skills Training (Dr. Bridget Hegeman of Team Z)
- [] Social Skills Training (Dr. Bridget Hegeman of Team Z)
- [] Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia CBT-I (Ben or Martina)
- [] Anger Management (Dr. Jill Morris of Team L)
- [] Smart Phone Support (Aubrey White of Occupational Therapy)
- [] Minneapolis VA Peer Support Groups
- [] Trauma-Based Services (Team L Consult)
- [] Nightmare treatment (Martina)
- [] Addiction Recovery Services (Dual Recovery Group, SMART Recovery)
- [] Bedrock – PTSD/substance use recovery (Dr. Lindsay Wiebusch-Andrews)
- [] Vocational Services (Vocational Rehabilitation Consult)
- [] Tobacco cessation counseling (Ben, Karey, or Martina)
- [] Dietary/Nutrition Services (Consult)

- Speech Therapy (Consult)
- Primary Care (Consult or primary care call center x1100)
- Neuropsychology (Consult)
- Pain Management Resources (i.e., physical therapy, pain clinic, Living a Valued Life with Chronic Pain, Women's Chronic Pain Group, Pain 101 Chronic Pain Group, Introductory Mindfulness-Based Practice Drop-In Group)
- Specialty medical care (e.g., sleep evaluation, neurology, urology evaluation):
- Center for Integrative Health and Healing (Consult)
- Recreation Therapy/Walking Group (consult)
- MOVE program (i.e., group lifestyle coaching, support groups, women's group, individual care, TeleMOVE, Annie texting app, Healthy Teaching Kitchen group)
- Other (Roll for Recovery Group; Balancing Group; Courageous Living Group; Living with Bipolar Disorder Group; Taking Charge of My Life and Health Group; EMDR; Clinical Hypnosis)

BENEFITS/RISKS OF PARTICIPATION

- **Benefits:** Research shows that actively participating in rehabilitation and recovery programs can improve a person's quality of life, social adjustment, ability to cope, knowledge about mental illness, reduce relapses, and reduce hospitalizations (Mueser, 2002). There is also evidence that talking with a peer support worker works well for increasing your sense of personal empowerment (Rogers et. al, 2007).
- Additional benefits include receiving education about resources such as skills classes and local activities. You may better understand your own values and goals as a result of participating in VBR. You will also be encouraged to define your personal vision of recovery.
- VBR staff have noticed that some people who have been in the program for a while start to talk more, make jokes, socialize with other members, teach other Veterans about the program and activities, encourage each other, and lead parts of meetings. We have noticed that Veterans who have been in our program for a while begin to think of themselves as people who can give back. Several have become or considered becoming peer counselors. People have told staff they feel supported at VBR.
- **Risks:** Being in VBR involves examining your life and making changes. This can result in discomfort because most people find it hard to change. You can cope with such discomfort by reminding yourself it is normal, talking with other Veterans and staff about ways to handle the discomfort, and taking small steps toward big changes.
- Sometimes people you love get used to you being a certain way. When you try to make changes, even healthy ones, they may get scared or uncomfortable. They may react differently to you or become upset with you. Usually they just need time to adjust. Talking

about their concerns may help. Sometimes people cannot adjust and relationships may change.

- Many Veterans have questions about VA compensation benefits. You may call the Veterans Administration at 1-800-827-1000 to speak to a benefits counselor. You may also contact your local veterans' service officer (VSO) to get more information. You can locate a VSO in your county by going to the following website: <http://www.macvso.org/cvso.html>.
- Because we leave VA grounds for trips, there are risks associated with being in the community. You can minimize risk to yourself on trips by using common sense, such as dressing appropriately for the weather and the activity and behaving in a safe, responsible manner. Staff on trips will always carry a cell phone and basic first aid supplies.

VBR REHABILITATION AGREEMENT (CODE OF CONDUCT):

1. While in Phase 1, you are required to attend VBR **at least TWICE per week on the skills days** of Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. You may pick which two skills days you attend on a weekly basis. You may attend all days of programming if you wish, and we encourage you to attend as many days of programming that your schedule allows. If you are unable to maintain your attendance in VBR, staff will remind you of the expectations, support you in returning to VBR, or connect you with other services. If you cannot attend VBR during a week because of illness, vacation, or other reasons, please call your coach or any VBR staff. You may also leave a message on the VBR main number 612-313-3240.
2. While in VBR, we expect you to work on goals and self-improvement during your recovery. VBR members work on improving health, learning skills to cope with mental health symptoms, increasing social connections, and any other individual goals. You are required to meet regularly with your coach (at least once per month) to problem solve and discuss your progress. You also have access to a peer specialist for any additional support you may need.
3. As a member of VBR of any phase, we expect you to refrain from attending in-person or video programming while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Alcohol and illegal drugs are not allowed on VA property or in VBR. If staff believe you are under the influence while at the CRRC, staff will request a urine drug screen or police-administered breathalyzer. If staff believe you are under the influence during video programming, we will disconnect you from the VVC group, and call you to discuss this issue individually.
4. We encourage you to get to know other veterans in the program. We hope that you will use the VBR member contact list to call others, plan community gatherings, and develop friendships. At the same time, we ask that you observe some boundaries while (interacting

with members outside of VBR). Outside of VBR is defined as any type of gathering that occurs without a VBR staff present.

- a. VBR discourages conducting business or exchanging money with others in the program.
 - b. VBR discourages having sexual relationships with others in the program. Soliciting sex from others, in any way, may result in discharge from the program. Staff will work with all parties involved to discuss the situation and consider how to manage it to ensure that the VBR group environment remains supportive for all members.
 - c. Please note that it is your individual choice to connect with other VBR members outside of VBR programming.
5. You are not allowed to smoke, which includes vaping, while attending video programming. If you smoke while attending in-person groups at the CRRC, you must stand 25 feet away from the door to the building and dispose of cigarette butts in the appropriate receptacle. Please do not litter! As a courtesy to your non-smoking peers, we ask that you do not smoke during outdoor group activities such as walks, picnics, etc.
 6. Please show respect to others while in VBR. VBR includes people from varying backgrounds with their own opinions, values and beliefs. Veterans are at varying stages in their MH recovery. Do not make negative comments based on race, religion or spirituality, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, status as a veteran, political affiliation, MH symptoms, or other personal characteristics.
 7. Please turn off or silence your cell phone when you are in group.
 8. VBR has zero tolerance for violence, abuse, or weapons. You will be discharged from VBR if you engage in verbal abuse, harassment, physical violence, or threat of violence toward others, and you will not be allowed to return. Weapons are not allowed on VA property, the CRRC, in VBR, or on VBR community outings.
 9. Privacy and confidentiality are important. Please do not talk about other veterans outside of groups. This includes their names and what they say in group. Please do not take any photos of group members, staff, or any other identifiable information. During video programming, please arrange to be in a private room or area.
 10. Hygiene is important for self-care and social connections. Please bathe, brush your teeth, and wear clean clothes when attending in-person groups. During video programming,

please dress and present yourself as if you were going to an in-person appointment at the VA.

11. You are not allowed to video or audio record an in-person or video group session.
12. Do not call into a VBR group while you are driving or in a public area (e.g., public transit, at a restaurant).
13. Texting with VBR staff is only to be used for communicating information about scheduling and/or cancelling individual appointments OR communicating information about the meetup location for community integration appointments. Texting is NOT to be used for any clinically significant information. Texts on VA-issued cell phones for staff is not secure, and thus, your privacy cannot be guaranteed. Please communicate clinical information via phone call or secure messaging with VBR staff. Texting with VBR staff also is NOT to be used for any urgent communications. VBR staff may not immediately respond to texts and also will not be responding to texts after business hours.
14. If you violate the VBR Code of Conduct, staff will attempt to create a plan with you to safely continue VBR programming. If a plan ensuring safety for all is unattainable, or you continue to violate the VBR Code of Connect, you will be discharged.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

DRESS CODE

- Wear casual, comfortable, and clean clothing.
- Do not wear clothing with swear words, sexual language, references to drugs or alcohol, or discriminatory remarks of any kind.
- When going on community trips, please dress appropriately for the weather and the activity. If you have questions about what is appropriate, please discuss with staff and/or other members.

SMOKING/TOBACCO STATEMENT

Federal buildings and vehicles are tobacco free. You may not use any kind of tobacco or e-cigarettes while in the CRRC building or in government vehicles. Please do not smoke or discard tobacco-related litter near the doors of the CRRC. Please do not smoke in front of neighboring businesses. You must stand at least 25 feet from the front door of the building while smoking.

CELL PHONE STATEMENT

Please turn off or silence cell phones while in VBR, including video groups. If you need to make or take a call, please step out into the CRRC lobby or outside the building.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

- In Phase 1, we require that you attend at least 2 skills days of VBR programming per week. Please call if you will miss an entire week.
- If you do not attend during a given week and do not call us, a VBR staff member will call you to assess your well-being and satisfaction with the program.
- If you miss 3 weeks in a row you may be discharged from VBR.
 - If you frequently miss weeks, even if you do not miss 3 weeks in a row, you may be discharged. Staff will talk with you before initiating discharge.
 - Family members or significant others may attend programming with the Veteran's (and the group's) approval. Veterans should discuss this with VBR members and staff in advance. Family members and significant others are expected to abide by the same rules of conduct as VBR members.
- In Phase 2, you are eligible to attend on Wednesdays, Fridays, and some guest presentations.
- As a Graduate, you are eligible to attend on Wednesdays as well as the monthly Graduates Group, which occurs the last Tuesday of the month.

SICK POLICY

- Do not come to VBR if you are sick. If you need to see a doctor, call the Primary Care Call Center at 612-467-1100.
 - The toll-free number for the Medical Center is 1-866-414-5058, then dial extension 1100 for the Primary Care Call Center.
- If you are sick and need to cancel, please call the CRRC to notify us.
- If you are hospitalized for any reason, please notify VBR (or ask a family member or significant other if you are not able to). VBR staff will not tell other members you are hospitalized unless you give us permission.

DRUG, ALCOHOL, AND PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION POLICY

- Do not attend VBR under the influence of drugs or alcohol. We reserve the right to refer you for a drug/alcohol screen if we suspect you are under the influence.
- If the drug screen is positive, you will meet with your coach and the Program Manager when not under the influence. They will develop a plan so that you may continue to participate in VBR while maintaining sobriety. Violation of this plan or failure to submit a

urine drug screen (UDS) and/or a police administered breathalyzer upon request may result in discharge from VBR.

- Prescription and over-the-counter medications may be brought into VBR as long as they are labeled and in the original container or in a medication organizer/pill box with your name on it. Please do not share any medication with other members or staff. Please do not ask anyone else for their medication. Please keep your medications with you at all times.

EMERGENCY CARE, SAFETY, AND SECURITY

EMERGENCY CARE

- If there is a life-threatening emergency, please dial 911 immediately and describe the nature of the emergency.
- If a psychiatric emergency occurs during regular business hours, please notify your outpatient mental health providers and/or VBR staff. Staff will assist you with obtaining appropriate care. If staff are not available go directly to the Minneapolis VA Emergency Department.
- If you need psychiatric emergency care after 4:30pm, on weekends or holidays, please call 911, the veterans' crisis line (988 OR 1-800-273-8255, press 1), or go to the nearest emergency room. You may also call the Minneapolis VA at 612-725-2000 and ask to speak with the Psychiatrist on Duty (P.O.D.).
- When you arrive at the emergency room, tell the person at the check-in desk that you are having a psychiatric crisis and describe your symptoms (e.g., feeling suicidal, homicidal, having hallucinations).
- If you know of another person who is talking about suicide or homicide, or having a psychiatric crisis, please let staff know or call 911.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

- Your safety is important. Please tell us if you observe unsafe conditions or actions.
 - If you see unsafe conditions or actions, you can also report them to the Patient Safety Manager at 612-467-3022 OR the Patient Advocates at 612-467-2106.
- While on video groups, please be in the location in which you had informed staff during your orientation or please message group facilitators your current address if it is different. This is for emergency purposes.
- If an event occurs that requires serious medical attention or police assistance, staff will press one of the emergency buttons or call 911. Staff may also request Veteran assistance in pressing the emergency button or calling 911. In the event of an emergency, please stay calm and follow staff or police instructions.

- If there is a fire or other emergency, please remain calm and follow staff instructions. You may be asked to evacuate the building via the nearest safe exit or go to a safe area inside the building. Specific emergency procedures are posted in VBR.
- Weapons, drugs, violent behavior, threats, and sexual harassment will not be tolerated at VBR. If you have weapons or drugs OR engage in threats or harassment, you will be asked to leave the CRRC immediately. If you refuse to leave, the Minneapolis police will be called and will escort you from VBR to a place that ensures your and others' safety (e.g., the ER or a legal setting). Police methods of maintaining security and escorting you may involve restraint. VBR staff do not practice restraint, nor do they place Veterans in seclusion.
- If you have weapons or drugs at the CRRC, threaten others, or harass others at VBR, you and the Program Manager will meet when it is safe to do so. They will discuss whether it is safe for you to remain in VBR and what you must do to continue in the program. If a plan to continue in VBR while maintaining safety cannot be developed or is violated, you will be discharged from the program. If you are discharged, VBR staff will attempt to help you identify appropriate alternative services.
 - The Disruptive Behavior Committee at the Minneapolis VA will be notified about your behavior and a flag may be placed on your chart informing providers about the history of and/or potential for disruptive behavior.

TRANSPORTATION

- Service-connected Veterans can ride public transportation in the Twin Cities for free. Veterans should show their VA identification card to Metro Transit drivers to verify they are service-connected. A brief description of this benefit is available on the Metro Transit website: <http://www.metrotransit.org/fares.aspx>. You can call Metro Transit at 612-373-3333. If you have questions about your ID card, you can call 612-467-1991.
- Metro Mobility is also a transportation service you may be eligible for. It is a door-to-door service operated by Metro Transit for individuals who cannot use regular transit. Contact Metro Transit or talk with VBR staff for more information.
- Parking is available at no cost to Veterans while they are attending appointments at the CRRC. You may park in the parking garage at 11th St. and Harmon Place. Obtain a voucher to pay for parking from CRRC clerks.
- Contact your VBR coach for additional information on transportation options, such as bus or light rail.

TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

- Travel reimbursement is meant to reimburse Veterans for the transportation costs of getting needed health care services.
- To receive reimbursement, you must be at least 30% service connected. If you are service connected for less than 30%, you can be eligible for travel reimbursement if the appointment is linked to a mental health service connection.

Collection of Travel Reimbursement

- After your VBR group or individual appointment, you will need to complete the necessary paperwork. You will have to do this for each appointment. You can either complete a hard copy of this form and send it in the mail. Please ask VBR staff for copies of this form if needed (form 10-3542). You can also complete the paperwork online using the Beneficiary Travel Self Service System (BTSSS). Please ask VBR staff for the How To manual for BTSSS if needed.
- It is recommended that you complete your paperwork within 30 days of the appointment.
- It can take up to 12 weeks to receive reimbursement if you file the paperwork via mail. It can take approximately 5 to 7 business days if you complete your form online using the BTSSS system.
- The travel reimbursement will be a direct deposit into your specified bank account.
- You may contact Beneficiary Travel at 612-467-1396 for further information on eligibility and reimbursement procedures. You may also visit their office at the Minneapolis Main VA between 0830 – 1600 located at 1S114.
- If you are depending on travel reimbursement for income, talk to your coach. Your coach can help you with a budget and/or problem-solve regarding financial resources.
- You are responsible for following national VA travel reimbursement rules. **You CAN be prosecuted, fined, and even imprisoned for wrongly collecting travel reimbursement.**
- If we learn that you are wrongfully collecting travel reimbursement, we will:
 - Not pre-schedule any VBR appointments until the matter is resolved
 - Notify the Patient Family Center that you should not be collecting travel reimbursement
 - **PLEASE NOTE THIS MAY RESULT IN NEGATIVE FINANCIAL AND/OR LEGAL CONSEQUENCES, SO PLEASE DO NOT BREAK THE RULES!**

TRANSITIONS AND DISCHARGES

TRANSITION: Ideally, you will determine in collaboration with your coach and support system when you are ready to transition to Phase 2 of VBR and then graduate from VBR. When you are

ready to transition, you should notify your coach. Staff will work with you to plan a transition that is consistent with your needs. Ideally you will work with your coach to summarize the goals you have accomplished while in VBR, share this summary with the VBR community, and receive a certificate of recognition from the staff and other members.

STAFF-INITIATED DISCHARGE: There may be times when staff will initiate a Veteran's discharge from the program. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT VETERANS WILL ALWAYS BE INVOLVED IN THIS PROCESS. In the event of a staff-initiated discharge, staff will present concerns to the Veteran orally (and in writing if desired), will document concerns in the medical record, and (if possible and safe) will work with the Veteran to develop a plan that will allow the Veteran to continue in VBR. The plan will be recorded, documented in the medical record, and a copy will be provided to the Veteran. The plan will include specific target behaviors to increase and/or decrease, suggestions for meeting behavior targets, responsibilities of the Veteran and the staff in carrying out the plan, a timeline for implementation, and consequences of not adhering to the plan.

The following are example reasons a Veteran may leave VBR:

- The Veteran has met his/her/their goals (successful discharge or transition).
- The Veteran does not attend VBR for 3 weeks and has not initiated contact with staff to discuss his/her/their absence.
- The Veteran does not attend VBR consistently over a prolonged period of time (e.g., in a 3-month period attends once every 2-3 weeks).
- It is unsafe for the Veteran to continue to participate (e.g., inappropriate behavior, threats or actual harm to self or others).
- The Veteran's goals and needs would be better met in another program and are not appropriate for VBR.
- The Veteran attends but makes no effort to participate.
- The Veteran no-shows or cancels an appointment, cannot be reached by phone and does not respond to written correspondence.
- The Veteran no longer wishes to participate in VBR.
- The Veteran refuses to participate in groups.
- The Veteran is actively using illegal drugs or misusing prescription medications during VBR appointments.

If a Veteran is discharged from VBR and later wishes to rejoin, the Veteran may have to wait if the program is full. The Veteran may be asked to meet with the Program Manager or the coach to discuss changes that have occurred since leaving the program. This may include talking about changes in goals, motivation, or safety concerns.

MAKING VBR BETTER (PROVIDING FEEDBACK)

We welcome your feedback about VBR. We want to know what is going well and what needs improvement. You can give feedback in multiple ways:

- If you feel comfortable, please tell staff what you like and what you do not like.
- Please complete VBR Member Satisfaction Surveys when they are offered.
- Attend the Open Forums (which occur three times per year) to provide feedback and help plan programming for the following month.

COMPLAINTS/GRIEVANCES

Patient Rights and Responsibilities: We encourage all Veterans to know their rights and responsibilities when using services at the VA. Brochures outlining patient rights and responsibilities are included with the VBR intake materials. They are also available in the Patient Family Center (1S-114) at the main hospital. These brochures will be reviewed annually during groups.

All Veterans have the right to contact the Patient Advocates who are located in room 4M-101 at the main VA hospital. Their telephone number is 612-467-2106. We encourage you to also use the complaint guidelines below:

VBR COMPLAINT GUIDELINES

Purpose: VBR wants to have a consistent process to handle complaints in a timely, respectful manner. All Veterans have the right to voice complaints and concerns in writing or orally without fear of reprisal. Making a complaint will not compromise a Veteran's access to care. Complaints will be received and resolved at the most appropriate level. All complaints will be addressed with sensitivity to the needs of the person making the complaint.

Complaints about VBR staff:

- Talk to the Program Manager if the complaint is about a staff other than the Program Manager. Veterans may also complete the below feedback and complaint form.
- The Program Manager will try to work with the Veteran and staff to resolve the problem. The Veteran will be notified of actions taken and outcomes within 5 days.
- If the Veteran is not satisfied with the outcome, he/she/they may contact the Patient Advocates at 612-467-2106.
- If the complaint is about the Program Manager or if the Veteran does not feel comfortable talking with the Program Manager, he/she/they may contact the Patient Advocates at 612-467-2106.

VBR Feedback and Complaint Form

Your Name:

Date:

Date of the issue (if applicable):

Description of issue:

Do you have any suggestions for how to manage this issue?

Other Resources:

If you feel that you may need an outside advocate for any reason, here is a listing of options:

Mental Health Assoc. Minnesota

www.mentalhealthmn.org*

(651) 493-6634

Toll free 1-800-862-1799

Ombudsman for Mental Health and Development Services

www.ombudmhdd.state.mn.us*

Main Office: (651)-757-1800

Toll free: 1-800-657-3506 (from outside metro area)

By Mail:

121 7th Place E, Ste 420, Metro Square Bldg.

St. Paul, MN 55101

Ombudsman for Long-Term Care

(651) 431-2555

Toll free 1-800-657-3591

Ombudsman for Health Facilities Complaints

(651) 201-4200

As an alternative, you may report concerns to the VA Office of Inspector General by calling the VAOIG Hotline toll-free at 1-800-369-7994, available 8:30am–4:00pm Eastern Time Monday–Friday excluding Federal holidays, by e-mailing vaoighotline@va.gov, or by faxing information to the VAOIG Hotline at 202-565-7936.

~The Minneapolis VA Medical Center is accredited by the Joint Commission~

VBR STAFF CODE OF ETHICS

Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch General Principles

- Public service is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws and ethical principles above private gain.
- Employees shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
- Employees shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
- An employee shall not, except as permitted by subpart B of this part, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeing official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by the employee's agency, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the employee's duties.
- Employees shall put forth honest effort in the performance of their duties.
- Employees shall not knowingly make unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
- Employees shall not use public office for private gain.
- Employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
- Employees shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
- Employees shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.
- Employees shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
- Employees shall satisfy in good faith their obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those—such as Federal State, or local taxes—that are imposed by law.

- Employees shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all people regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability.
- Employees shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that they are violating the law or the ethical standards set forth in this part. Whether particular circumstances create an appearance that the law or these standards have been violated shall be determined from the perspective of a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts.

Additional ethics guidelines for VBR Staff:

- Provide treatment that recognizes and reflects the dignity of the individual and offers consideration of the psychosocial, spiritual, and cultural values that influence the perception of treatment needs.
- Maintain current licensure and abide by their discipline's Code of Ethics. VBR staff shall conduct themselves in a manner that promotes the values, integrity, and mission of the VA as well as that of the Veterans Bridge to Recovery Program.
- Consult with and adhere to guidance from Contracting, Fiscal, Compliance, Continuous Improvement, Business Office, Public Affairs, Privacy Officer, Regional Counsel, and other committees and officials when applicable.
- Do not use their official positions to engage in personal fundraising and do not solicit donations for a particular agency or group in their official capacity.
- Adhere to the VA's rules, regulations, and expectations of client privacy and confidentiality.
- Adhere to procedures for proper witnessing of documents such as research consent forms and advance directives, when applicable.
 - Research consent forms should be signed by witnesses who are not part of the research or VBR team.
 - Advance Directives cannot be witnessed by providers involved in a Veteran's care.
- Undertake continual efforts to maintain their competence in providing recovery-based mental health services.
- Strive, with consent of the Veteran, to include family members and other support systems in the Veteran's care in order to promote recovery and rehabilitation.

- Will discontinue professional relationships with Veterans when it is in the best interest of the Veteran, when such service is no longer required, or when continued service will result in a violation of the Code of Ethics.
- Will promptly notify the Veteran when an interruption in services is anticipated.
- Engages in transition or discharge planning with Veterans, including an appropriate transfer to another professional or service when necessary.
- Do not knowingly harass or demean any persons with whom they interact in their work based on factors such as that person's disability, age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, language, socioeconomic status, or other personal characteristics.
- Strive to create an environment in which staff and Veterans are free from abuse, financial or other exploitation, retaliation, humiliation, or neglect.
- Provide an appropriate explanation of their services, consider the Veteran's preferences and best interests, describe therapeutic alternatives and possible risks, and obtain the Veteran's consent to provide treatment.
- Protect confidential information pertaining to Veteran and their care. On rare occasions, VBR staff may have to release confidential information without the Veteran's permission in order to protect the safety of the Veteran and/or others.
- Release confidential information to facilitate treatment goals to providers outside of the VA with permission from the Veteran. VBR staff only access information in the Veteran's medical chart at the VA on a need-to-know basis.
- Maintain electronic medical records of VBR appointments (both walk-in and scheduled) and write notes in compliance with federal, legal, and accreditation-board requirements.
- Refrain from entering into a dual relationship if the dual relationship could reasonably be expected to impair that staff person's competence such as their objectivity, ability to be effective in performing his or her job in VBR, or otherwise risks exploitation or harm to the Veteran. A dual relationship consists of a staff person having a professional role with a Veteran and at the same time having another role (social, romantic, financial, etc.) with the Veteran.
- Under most circumstances, VBR staff do not accept gifts from Veterans. Gifts of small monetary value (under \$20) or perishable items may be acceptable depending on the circumstances. VBR staff may not accept cash, checks or gratuities under any circumstances.

- If the VBR staff advocates on behalf of a Veteran who has been determined legally or financially incompetent, they safeguard the person's interests, rights, and the person's previously expressed choices.
- Peer support staff boundaries differ from those of other personnel in areas such as sharing personal lived experience and attending social events. Peer support will utilize peer support supervisor to help guide interventions in individual and group settings.

REPORTING ALLEGED ETHICS VIOLATIONS

VBR and the Minneapolis VA Health Care System fully support the reporting of alleged ethics violations. Staff and Veterans who report possible ethics violations will be protected from retaliation or reprisal. Reporting a possible ethics violation is not grounds for dismissal from a job or discharge from the VBR program.

How Veterans can report possible ethics violations:

1. If a Veteran feels comfortable talking to the staff person they suspect of violating the ethics code, the Veteran can present his/her/their concerns to that individual directly. The staff person is responsible for documenting the concern, responding to the concern within 5 business days, obtaining consultation or supervision as needed, and reporting the concern and action taken to the Program Manager.
2. A Veteran may also report possible ethics violations to the Program Manager. The Program Manager is responsible for documenting the concern, responding to the concern within 5 business days, obtaining consultation or supervision as needed, and recording the concern and action taken for tracking purposes.
3. A Veteran may also report possible ethics violations to the Patient Advocates. The Patient Advocates are located in room 1S-143. Their telephone number is 612-725-2106. The Patient Family Center keeps track of Veteran concerns and discusses the concerns with involved staff and their supervisors.