



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON
November 8, 2012

A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy's devastation, I want you to know that VA is doing everything possible to provide safe and high quality care and benefits to Veterans in the New York Metropolitan area. Safety of Veterans and VA employees remains our highest concern. We are proactively moving to quickly and efficiently assess and repair storm damage and safely return to normal operations as soon as possible.

All VA facilities in the New York Metropolitan area and surrounding states are open and operating with two exceptions: The VA New York Harbor Healthcare System's Manhattan facility (Veterans Health Administration—VHA) and the New York Regional Office (Veterans Benefits Administration—VBA) remain closed. As part of the Administration's activities ahead of the storm, our hospital was evacuated, safely and efficiently, on October 28, with the support, foresight and professionalism of VA employees.

Approximately one hundred and thirty patients from our Manhattan hospital were safely evacuated. The VA hospital, which is located within the City's flood zone, did sustain extensive flood damage. The basement and ground floor were flooded, damaging electrical, mechanical, steam and fire suppression systems, as well as some medical equipment. The building itself is structurally sound, but not yet safe for staff or patients. Our regional office remains closed because it has no electricity or heat. It will take time for utility companies and VA to repair the damage to these two facilities and resume normal operations, but we will do so as quickly as possible.

VA Centralized Scheduling is contacting Veterans to determine alternate VA medical center and community based outpatient clinic locations for their healthcare. We have established an Emergency Pharmacy Refill Program to keep providing medications for enrolled Veterans, who can access the system by going to any big chain pharmacy with your Veteran ID card and medication bottle with label (showing a refill date within the last 90 days). Ask the pharmacist to call Heritage Health Solutions Customer Care Center at toll free 1-866-265-0124, where a Customer Care Representative will qualify the request by asking a few questions. If a controlled drug is needed, please contact the Brooklyn VAMC Emergency Department at 718-836-6600 ext 3125. A list of other telephone numbers for Veterans to use for information on general health questions, appointments, and for medication refills is attached.

We understand the inconvenience this hurricane has caused Veterans, but I ask everyone to be patient as we navigate these difficulties. I am very proud of our VA employees who proactively took measures to guarantee Veteran and VA employee safety well before the storm arrived. Thank you for your patience during these difficult times. Again, we will do everything possible to resume all services as soon as possible while always keeping the safety of patients in mind.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Eric K. Shinseki", is positioned above the printed name.

Eric K. Shinseki

Contact Numbers for Veterans

- For medical emergencies, please dial 911.
- VA Nurse Help Line, 1-800-877-6976 to speak to a registered nurse if you experience any symptoms or have any health related questions.
- Centralized Scheduling, 1-718-630-3614 if you have questions about an appointment at the Manhattan VA or to schedule an appointment.
- Mental Health Help Desk, 718-630-3759 (9AM to 4PM)
- Pharmacy Call Center, 1-888-207-2004. Pharmacy phone number for ordering refills through the automated attendant (24/7) as well as speaking with a live attendant Monday – Friday 8 AM to 7:30PM.
- If you did not receive your monthly VA Compensation or Pension benefits, please call 1-800-827-1000 for assistance.
- For assistance with Education benefits, 1-888-GI-Bill1.
- If you have a VA loan and your home was damaged by the hurricane, contact FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or by calling 1-800-621-3362. You may also contact VA at 877-827-3702 to speak with a VA loan specialist about your options.