

**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Healthcare-VISN 4

# VISION

*for Excellence*

Newsletter for Veterans and Stakeholders in VISN 4

Issue 30

## TAKE A MOMENT

# REACH OUT

**Don't wait for a crisis.  
Take a moment to reach out.  
You can act now to help  
prevent Veteran suicide later.**



**Veterans  
Crisis Line**  
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

# Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of VISN 4:

I hope everyone is having an enjoyable and healthy fall season.

Our Veterans are driven and resilient, but everyone needs a little help sometimes. Whether you are a Veteran looking for peer-to-peer support, clinical care, or counseling, VISN 4 is here to help you. Our VA and community resources can give you the help you need to get through life's challenges.

If you are a Veteran that needs help or someone providing support to a Veteran, this issue will spotlight the many ways you can "reach out" for help. Our team of dedicated mental health professionals are here for you. You don't have to be enrolled in VA health care or registered with VA to use the Veterans Crisis Line. If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, call 1-800-273-8255 and press 1 to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Also inside this issue, I am pleased to highlight the new outpatient clinic coming to the Pittsburgh area, the continued expansion of connected care in our network, the most recent winner of our VISN 4 I CARE Award, and our new VISN 4 medical center websites.

On behalf of the VISN 4 leadership team, I want to sincerely thank our Veterans and their families in VISN 4 for entrusting us to fulfill your health care needs.

Please stay safe and make sure you get the COVID vaccine, COVID booster shot if recommended, and your annual flu shot which is now available at your local VA medical center and from community providers!

It is our honor to serve you.

Sincerely,

Timothy W. Liezert  
Network Director



## VA Healthcare-VISN 4 Leadership Team

**Timothy W. Liezert**  
Network Director

**Charles R. Thilges**  
Deputy Network Director

**Timothy Burke, M.D.**  
Chief Medical Officer

**Moira M. Hughes, FACHE**  
Quality Management Officer

**Joseph Haverstick**  
Chief Financial Officer

**Amber Mesoras**  
Acting Human Resources Officer

**David E. Cowgill**  
Communications Manager

**Jo Petro**  
Executive Assistant



◀ Participating in the ceremonial first shovel of dirt for the new Monroeville outpatient clinic are, from left to right, Sean Roberts, an executive of developer Summit Smith; Donald Koenig, special advisor to the VA under secretary for Health for Integrated Veterans Care; Monroeville Mayor Nicholas Gresock; U.S. Rep. Mike Doyle; Joanna Rosato, acting regional administrator for the General Services Administration; Kevin Amick, acting director of VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and Timothy Liezert, VISN 4 network director.

# AROUND the NETWORK

## VA Patient Experience Awards

Congratulations to the VISN 4 facilities who received awards at the VA Patient Experience Symposium:

Erie VAMC won the Patient Experience Innovation Award for their “Care Closer to Home” project! This award was decided by a panel of VA patient experience professionals as well as by the votes of thousands of VA employees.

James E. Van Zandt Altoona VAMC won the award for Best Overall Patient Experience in a level III facility, and Lebanon VAMC won the award for Best Overall Patient Experience in a level II facility. Both awards were based off the All Employee Survey and patient satisfaction scores.

These awards are an indication of the Veteran-centric culture at these facilities and they certainly bring credit upon themselves and upon VISN 4.

## New Outpatient Clinic Opening in Monroeville, Pa.

Earlier this year, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) awarded a \$92 million build-to-suit lease for a VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) near the Monroeville Mall Macy’s department store on Mall Circle Drive in Monroeville, Pennsylvania. This effort is part of a partnership between GSA and VA to deliver six CBOCs across the nation. VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) will staff and operate this clinic.

This new state-of-the-art facility will improve Veterans’ access to primary and specialty outpatient services and reduce drive times for many Pittsburgh-area Veterans enrolled in VA care. The 20-year lease includes 64,000 square feet and parking and supports VA’s Strategic Capital Investment Planning process.

Construction is expected to begin in fall 2021, with substantial completion in summer 2023. VAPHS anticipates occupancy and opening to the community will follow in early 2024.

Services offered at the new clinic will include integrated primary and mental health care, physical therapy, laboratory, podiatry, optometry, and more.


Not all primary care will be moved out of University Drive in 2023. VAPHS will ensure a planned, smooth transition for all Veterans, working with them to determine the best location for them to receive the high-quality care that they have earned and deserve.

Get VA health care now!  
**1-833-TELE-URGENT**  
(1-833-835-3874)



Available 8 a.m. – midnight  
365 days a year  
Overnight hours coming soon!  
[www.visn4.va.gov/tele-urgent](http://www.visn4.va.gov/tele-urgent)





If you're struggling,  
take a moment.

# REACH OUT

## Learn to recognize red flags

People can experience an emotional or mental health crisis due to a wide range of situations. For some, it might be the end of a personal relationship. For others, it might be the loss of a job. For Veterans, these crises can be heightened by their experiences during military service.

When emotional issues reach a crisis point, Veterans and their loved ones should contact the Veterans Crisis Line. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1. To chat online, send a text to 838255.



Many Veterans may not show any signs of intent to harm themselves before doing so, but some actions can be a sign that a person needs help.

Veterans in crisis may show behaviors that indicate a risk of self-harm. The following can all be warning signs:

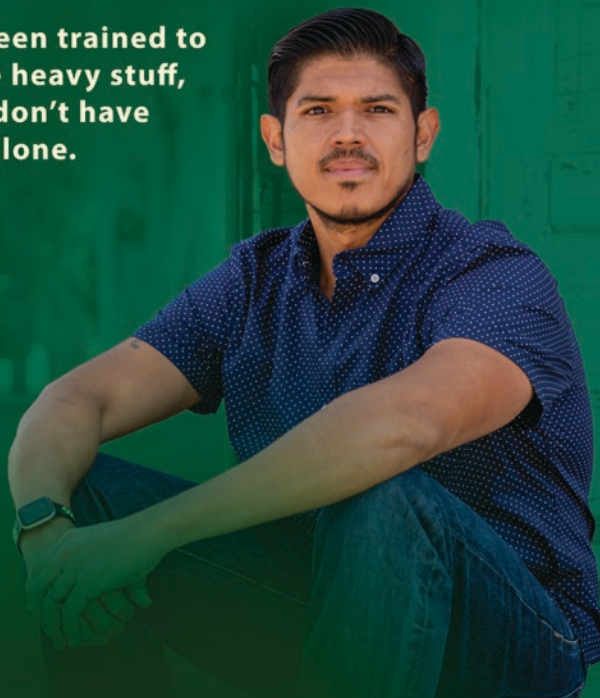
- Appearing sad or depressed most of the time
- Hopelessness; feeling like there's no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling as if there is no reason to live
- Feeling excessive guilt, shame, or sense of failure
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Losing interest in hobbies, work, or school
- Increasing alcohol or drug misuse

- Neglecting personal welfare; a deteriorating physical appearance
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Showing violent behavior, like punching a hole in the wall or getting into fights
- Giving away prized possessions
- Getting affairs in order, tying up loose ends, or writing a will

The following signs require immediate attention:

- Thinking about hurting or killing yourself
- Looking for ways to kill yourself
- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Self-destructive behavior such as drug abuse, weapons, etc.

**You've been trained to carry the heavy stuff, but you don't have to do it alone.**



## Find support near you

No matter what you are experiencing, there is support to get your life back on track. Whether you're looking for clinical care, counseling, assistance with benefits, or something else, we're here to help.

VA medical centers offer a range of acute care and community-based outpatient services, including:

- Primary care
- Mental health care
- Peer support
- Homelessness programs
- Nursing homes and more

Use the online search tool below to find resources and assistance close to you.

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/local-resources>



### *If you're a Veteran needing support*



#### **Make a Call**

I feel like I should be strong enough to handle anything. But life has been rough lately and I need help.

Life has been piling up. Too many bad things happening at once. I want to get help now.



#### **Send a Text or Email**

I feel really alone right now. Can I call you to talk?

Even though I've been out for a while, I still can't get some things out of my mind. Can we meet up and talk?



### *If you want to show a Veteran that you care*



#### **Make a Call**

I'm just calling to catch up. How are you?

I know things have been rough for you lately. Tell me what's been going on. I want to listen and help.



#### **Send a Text or Email**

How is everything going? I'm here for you if you want to talk. I can help you find support if you need it.

I heard you're going through a tough time. You don't have to go through it alone—I'm here.



# VA S.A.V.E. Training

## Supporting Our Veterans

### What is VA S.A.V.E. Training?

VA S.A.V.E. Training will help you act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts. The acronym S.A.V.E. helps you remember the important steps involved in suicide prevention:

- S** Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized
- A** Ask the most important question of all — *“Are you thinking of killing yourself?”*
- V** Validate the Veteran’s experience
- E** Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help

**You can prevent Veteran suicide.**  
**Start by learning the VA S.A.V.E. acronym.**



VA along with the PsychArmor Institute offers an online suicide prevention training video that provides simple steps anyone can take when talking with Veterans at risk for suicide. View the online training video at <https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>.

NOTE: Users are required to create a free account with PsychArmor to access the training.

### Supporting our Veterans

You can support a Veteran through a crisis. Keep these tips in mind when talking with a Veteran who may be at risk for suicide:

- Remain calm
- Listen more than you speak
- Maintain eye contact
- Act with confidence
- Do not argue
- Use open body language
- Limit questions — Let the Veteran do the talking
- Use supportive, encouraging comments
- Be honest — There are no quick solutions, but help is available

### Additional Resources

**VA Mental Health Services:** Get information about inpatient and outpatient services available through VA at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov).

**Online Resource Locator:** Find VA facilities, Vet Centers, suicide prevention coordinators, and other VA resources at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator).

**Make the Connection:** Veterans and their loved ones can find out how to connect with VA resources at [www.MakeTheConnection.net](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net).

**Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Program:** Locate the VA PTSD program nearest you at [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov).



Confidential chat at  
[VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net) or text 838255

## Signs of Suicidal Thinking

There are behaviors that may be signs a Veteran needs support. Learn to recognize these warning signs:

- Hopelessness, feeling like there is no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from family and friends

The presence of the following signs in a Veteran requires immediate attention:

- When asked, they express a desire to hurt or kill themselves
- When prompted, they reveal they are looking for ways to kill themselves
- They talk about death, dying, or suicide
- They begin to exhibit self-destructive behavior, such as increased drug or alcohol use, talking about acquiring/using weapons for self-harm, and stockpiling medication

## Ask the Question

There are behaviors that may be signs a Veteran needs support. Know how to ask the most important question of all:

***“Are you thinking of killing yourself?”***

Other ways to ask the question include:

***“Are you thinking of suicide?”***

***“Have you had thoughts about taking your own life?”***

When asking the question, remember:

- **DO** ask the question if you’ve identified warning signs or symptoms
- **DO** ask the question in such a way that is natural and flows with the conversation
- **DO NOT** ask the question as though you are looking for a “no” answer (“You’re not thinking of killing yourself, are you?”)
- **DO NOT** wait to ask the question until he or she is halfway out the door

## Validate the Veteran’s Experience

As you listen to the Veteran, ask him or her to do the talking and use supportive, encouraging comments. Use the following steps to let the Veteran know that you are listening and acknowledge his or her experience:

- Talk openly about suicide
- Be willing to listen and allow the Veteran to express his or her feelings
- Recognize the situation is serious
- Do not pass judgement
- Reassure them that help is available

## Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

If a Veteran is having suicidal thoughts, remain calm and reassure them that help is available:

- **DO NOT** keep the Veteran’s suicidal behavior a secret
- **DO NOT** leave him or her alone
- Try to get the person to seek immediate help from his or her doctor or the nearest hospital or emergency room, OR
- Call 911
- You can also call the confidential Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1.

## Safety is Important

Never negotiate with someone who has a gun. Get to safety and call 911. If the Veteran has taken pills, cut himself or herself, or has done harm to himself or herself in some way, call 911.



# New VA Medical Center Websites

Great news! VISN 4 has just launched all new medical center websites that will give you better service and an easier online experience.

Veterans, families and caregivers have told us that VA medical center websites were confusing to navigate, contain outdated or missing information and do not match their VA health care journey.

## ***We listened.***

To better meet the needs of Veterans, families and caregivers, VA has built all-new websites for medical centers and related health care facilities. We have used your feedback to develop a website that provides everything Veterans, families and caregivers need to prepare for a visit, get care and connect with your VA health care team:

- Directions to main VAMCs and associated clinics
- Phone numbers

- Parking and transportation information
- Hospital and clinic hours
- Patient registration
- Making appointments and refilling prescriptions

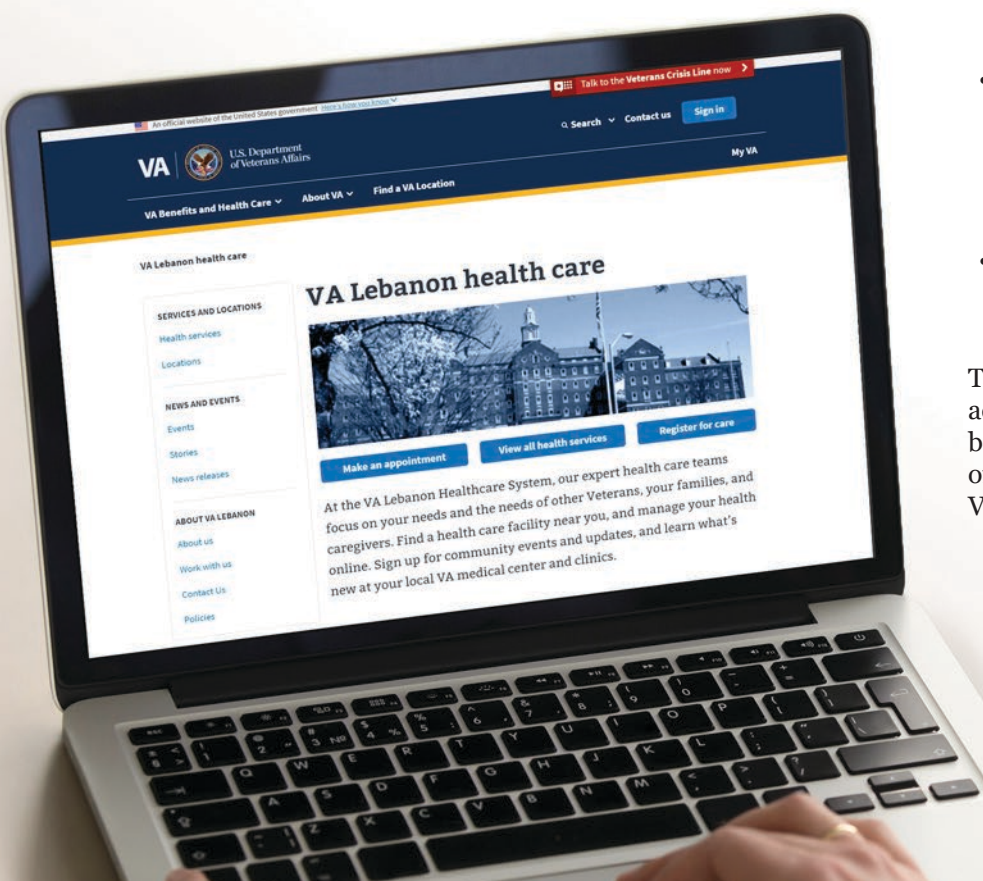
You will find a new complete list of VA health services, social programs and care coordinators, including:

- Primary and specialty care
- Mental health care
- Caregiver support and care coordinators for women Veterans, LGBT Veterans, returning service members and more

We have built a mobile-first user experience that gets you to all content and tools in just one or two clicks, including:

- Online scheduling, prescription refills and access to medical records
- A new list of health services that uses Veteran-friendly names and descriptions
- New social and health program pages that make it easier to connect Veterans and their caregivers with care coordinators to help them with their health care journey
- Increased speed and mobile features that allow users to call VA or get driving directions with a single click

To visit our new websites, no special action is needed and you'll automatically be redirected to the new site. It's all part of our continuing work to improve our Veterans' VA experience.



To learn more about the new websites, view a short video on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/nxGscKMiMiU>.





*I CARE represents the core values that define the basic elements of how we go about our work—“who we are”—and form the underlying principles we use every day in our service to Veterans.*

*VISN 4 established a new, quarterly I CARE award to recognize employees who not only demonstrate our I CARE values, but who go the extra mile to live by our I CARE ideals. There are many wonderful examples of employees demonstrating these values in their day-to-day work.*

## Integrity • Commitment • Advocacy • Respect • Excellence

### FY21 3rd Quarter Awardee



#### **Bronwyn Morris, RN** Coatesville VA Medical Center

Bronwyn Morris is a nurse care manager who has worked for the past 7 years in the Home-Based Primary Care program. She is a compassionate nurse who goes the extra mile for all her Veterans. There is one Veteran that Bronwyn has worked with extensively over the past year and advocated for his many needs, going above and beyond in caring for him.

This particular Veteran has a history of homelessness, and he was not paying the rent and was about to be evicted. Bronwyn found an advocacy agency and assisted with the application for the Representative Payee Program by helping him compile all necessary documentation and signatures.

She made weekly visits to help him pay his bills. She volunteered to serve as an emergency contact for Meals on Wheels since he has a hearing impairment and often cannot hear his phone ring. She also assisted him in obtaining a new pair of hearing aids.

When the cleanliness of his home deteriorated to the point that no home health aide agency would come into the home for housekeeping, Bronwyn reached out to many community cleaning agencies and eventually found an agency to clean the Veteran's home so that home health aide services can now be obtained.

And when he needed a new washer and dryer, Bronwyn found a Veteran's service group who agreed to provide minor repairs and installation of new flooring in the home so that the appliances could be delivered and safely installed.

Due to Bronwyn's steadfast advocacy, this Veteran escaped homelessness and remains happy and healthy in his home!

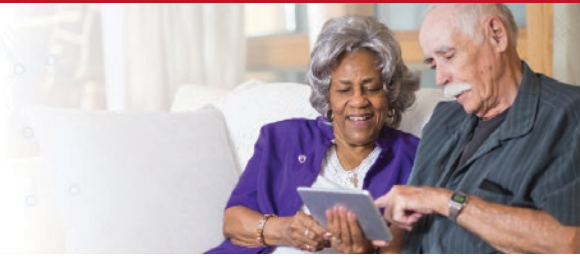
# Telehealth

During fiscal year 2021, our connected care programs proved to be extremely valuable. Our staff worked hard to support providers and patients as they relied more on virtual modalities to deliver and receive care.

- The percentage of Veterans in VISN 4 who engaged in telehealth grew from 25% to 40% over the past year.
- Veterans in VISN 4 sent a total of 574,000 secure messages to their care teams — a 30% increase — allowing for clinic time to be used on patients that needed care the most.
- Our Remote Patient Monitoring-Home Telehealth (RPM-HT) program served more than 7,000 Veterans as our home telehealth care coordinators ensured COVID diagnosed Veterans remained healthy.

- Nearly 2,000 Veterans used the Annie application to help them in their own self-care as VA clinicians assigned protocols to help them with their care plans.
- More than 111,000 Veterans in VISN 4 had at least one (1) telehealth appointment.
- More than 83,000 Veterans in VISN 4 had at least one (1) VA Video Connect (VVC) visit in their home, community or workplace.

VA will continue to offer Veterans high quality virtual care to ensure patients have a say in how their care is delivered and that they remain safe.



*Protect yourself and your loved ones*

# FREE flu shots!

Now available at your local VA medical center, outpatient clinic, and in-network retail pharmacy and urgent care locations in VA's Community Care Network.

[www.prevention.va.gov/flu](http://www.prevention.va.gov/flu)



### VA Healthcare-VISN 4

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### Vision for Excellence - Issue 30

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### We'd Like to Hear from You

Vision for Excellence is published for the employees, volunteers, patients and friends of VA Healthcare-VISN 4. For more information about this publication, contact David Cowgill at 412-822-3318 or [david.cowgill@va.gov](mailto:david.cowgill@va.gov).