ASHEVILLE, NC — The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System pushed more than 1,100 vaccines to Veterans Saturday, March 27, during a mass-vaccination effort at Charles George VA Medical Center.

The Health Care System has provided more than 10,000 vaccines to Veterans and staff since first receiving the Moderna Vaccine in late December. Since that time, it is now providing first and second doses of the Pfizer Vaccine. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has also been used at the Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Rutherford County, Franklin and Hickory North Carolina.

In an effort to get as many Veterans vaccinated as want it, the Health Care System has removed all restrictions and is now vaccinating all enrolled Veterans regardless of age, profession or medical conditions.

And getting vaccinated starts with a simple phone call.

Veterans call the Charles George VA Medical Center at (828) 298-7911, extension 4436, and they are either scheduled for an appointment, or they can leave a message, and the staff will call them back.

Getting the shot has also been simplified.

Once an appointment is made, the Veterans drive up to the outdoor shot clinic tents, where they are checked in and provided the vaccination. Once they get the shot, they pull over to a designated area to wait for 15 minutes while an EMT monitors them. Then they are off on their way.
Not so long ago, VA questioned whether Veterans were receiving the care they needed when and where they needed it. In the last year, VA has demonstrated superior proficiency in how quickly its excellent care is delivered.

We’ve shown that VA can turn on a dime. A year ago, we created a new lexicon and developed new guidelines and protocols for people that immediately went into effect; mind you, the coronavirus pandemic was in its American infancy. We quickly adapted to new rules, restrictions, procedures, repurposed spaces, virtual appoints, etc. Intrepid clinical practitioners and researchers found room in their workspaces to try new things and apply what they knew to what they didn’t know. Innovation flourished. It had to. We found ways to restrict access but keep things moving.

We redefined priorities but continued to serve successfully. We have managed to move forward and reopen some spaces, enabling more personal, in-person visits. And we have coped with the physical restructuring necessary to take care of our most serious patient conditions while simultaneously battling COVID and sending recovered Veterans back home to their families. Our transition to vaccination was epic. To date, we have vaccinated more than 225,000 Veterans, growing every day. Now, with the Strengthening and Amplifying Vaccination Efforts to Locally Immunize All Veterans and Every Spouse Act, known as the SAVE LIVES Act, VA is moving the bar again.

As many of you already know, the SAVE LIVES Act allows VA to soon provide COVID-19 vaccinations to all Veterans, their spouses, and caregivers. The Act increases the number of people eligible to receive a vaccine through VA from 9.5 to 33 million, prompting VA Secretary McDonough to advise, “Meeting the task of vaccinating this expanded population will be a tremendous undertaking for the VA and will require a significant increase in our allocation of vaccine supply, but I am confident that VA’s workforce is up to the task.” Yet, we have already begun doing it. Within days of President Biden’s signature on the bill, VHA had instructions and a process to carry out the unprecedented mandate.

We are prepared to process as many as we can in the easiest way possible for everyone. Our staff are agile and resilient. We are superior performers. We turn every challenge into an opportunity. So, beginning with Asheville on March 27, we began administering vaccine doses to spouses, caregivers, and Veterans who otherwise may not have received the VA vaccine. All of our facilities have amended their protocols and adjusted practices, so we are prepared to vaccinate everyone we can.

Stephanie Young | Acting VA Mid Atlantic Health Care Network Director, VISN 6
Fayetteville PTSD Team Receives National Recognition

A VA health care team from Southeastern North Carolina recently received national kudos for work they do to help Veterans heal. The Fayetteville PTSD clinic, through the leadership of Dr. Jeff Jones, was recognized by the National Center for PTSD Mentoring Program for their progress and improvements.

Dr. Jones attributes the cause for attention, “Most importantly, [to] the Trauma Specialty Program (TSP) team members’ commitment to increasing the use of evidence-based therapies since before the [Coronavirus] pandemic began.” While that may be true, the humble leader was singled out in a statement by the program for his inspirational direction. “We clearly recognized his commitment to the mission of PTSD specialty care and commitment to ongoing process improvements.”

Dr. Jones points to the team’s dedication and its opportunity to optimize newly available technologies, like VA Video Connect (VVC) to strengthen team members’ cohesion and to more completely engage Veterans during the COVID-19 era. “When the clinic went all-remote early during the pandemic, we supported one another through virtual treatment team meetings,” Jones said. The team also relied on research suggesting that evidence-based therapies can be effectively delivered remotely.

The team embraced the opportunity, capitalizing on increased availability and authoritative guidance to expand VVC use. Dr. Jones said the team could offer evidence-based psychotherapies to motivated Veterans at remote locations where in-person appointments previously may have been a challenge.

The mentoring program staff added that, “The steady work of your PTSD team has resulted in clear improvements in the percentage of your Veterans with PTSD who engaged evidence-based and measurement-based care.”

Fayetteville Executive Director Dan Dücker, among many VISN leaders chiming in with congratulations, excitedly greeted the team, encouraging them to “keep doing what you do,” noting the growth in service reflected in steady gains for each of the six last quarters. The mentoring program staff concluded, noting “We recognize the countless additional stressors and burdens that the field is experiencing [due to the COVID-19 epidemic], which makes your accomplishments all the more impressive.”

Dr. Jones says that there are opportunities they have learned that will be available on which to capitalize after the pandemic breaks. “We anticipate the importance of maintaining a strong ability to continue to offer VVC-based therapies even after pandemic restrictions lift,” he says, which he believes should enable them to continue the performance and growth.

Salem Social Worker Helps Community Pantries Adjust to Pandemic

By Rosaire Bushey
SALEM VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Homelessness and food insecurity are not Veteran-specific issues, so working together with the local community provides social workers like Jeremy Floyd, the Housing Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUDVASH) Case Manager, an opportunity to help Veterans who may be in either or both of these categories.

Floyd has been working with Feeding Southwest Virginia (FSV) to coordinate disaster-relief food boxes, and because of the pandemic, the last year has seen a shift in the way food pantries typically operate. As Case Manager for HUDVASH, Floyd works both to assist with housing and food insecurity issues for Veterans throughout the area.

“The food pantries have had to adjust their distribution process to keep up with the increase in demand and need for assistance as well as social distancing and COVID-19 precautions for safety and this presents a challenge for homeless Veterans,” Floyd says. “Veterans and the general population had difficulty before navigating resources, but with COVID-19, even more so now.”

Floyd has been working with distribution sites and engaging with FSV to set up boxes specifically for homeless Veterans. The collaboration has worked to fill a vital food need throughout the onset of the pandemic.

“The Blue Ridge Continuum of Care — the region’s local planning group working to end homelessness — has seen a slight increase of inflow of Veterans into the Roanoke area since the pandemic
Salem Social Worker Helps Community Pantries Adjust to Pandemic

began,” he explains. “This increase has really led the whole community to work together even more to provide necessary resources. Grants in the local government and federal government, as well as Total Action for Progress — a community action agency that serves 11 locations in the Roanoke Valley, have stepped in and are vital for offering assistance.”

The funding from these sources helps both civilians and Veterans who have issues ranging from homelessness to risk of eviction or assistance with utilities.

“They (TAP) have been a huge asset for us and the community,” Floyd says. “The pandemic has resulted in job markets being affected which is a huge burden on the local employment commission. A lot of people have been forced to make tough choices, like paying for food or rent. A lot of people choose food, as they wonder where their next meal will come from or how they will make it through the week.”

Food insecurity is not a one-time event, but rather a weekly or monthly issue. Pre-pandemic people sought assistance at sites such as food pantries, the Salvation Army, or faith-based providers. But the pandemic meant more people were using these services and what normally would have been a 30-minute food pantry visit sometimes turned into 3 hours during peak influx.

“We reached out to FSV and said, ‘Look, we haven’t seen this before. What can you offer?’ Their response was amazing,” Floyd says. “They worked with us a for a couple months and helped with emergency packages. They had their suppliers who donated a lot of things and packaged for Veterans, and we took some fleet vehicles and distributed these packages to Veterans on our caseload. Since then, FSV appears in the community with a food truck and hands out food packages.”

To meet the challenge of providing aid in a pandemic, Floyd says the program follows protocols that involve screening Veterans as well as sanitation and cleaning for vehicles and personal protective equipment for staff.

“Some days you’re suited up like you’re going into the OR,” Floyd says. “We have masks, gloves, and face shields in the kits for Veterans and employee protection. It has been a year now with these protocols, and it’s starting to become second nature — it’s part of life now, and it’s odd if you don’t have some of these safety things in place, or if your gloves or mask isn’t on, you feel as if something is missing or out of place.”

Since the beginning of the pandemic, many agencies have adapted to the new normal and have systems in place to distribute aid. But help is still needed.

“Food pantries will always need people to volunteer with time or donations,” Floyd suggests. “Roanoke Area Ministries, FSV, and Christian Soldiers are local communities that have places for donations, so people should check with their local communities to find out where and when donations can be accepted.”

Hampton VA Medical Center Opens Two Mass-Vaccination Clinics

By John Rogers

HAMPTON VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

In addition to Hampton VA Medical Center’s on-site vaccination clinics, on March 8, 2021, Hampton VAMC began giving COVID-19 vaccinations (Janssen and Moderna) to Veterans at Hampton University’s Convocation Center. Moreover, on March 17, 2021, Hampton VAMC began administering COVID-19 vaccinations to Veterans at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) facility in Norfolk, Virginia.

“In addition to Moderna, Hampton VAMC is eager to be able to offer Janssen, a third highly effective vaccine to more Veterans,” said John Rogers, Public Affairs Officer. “This one-dose vaccine will help us reach our ultimate goal of offering COVID-19 vaccinations to all Veterans and employees who want to be vaccinated.” In collaboration with Hampton University and the Norfolk VFW, we can provide greater access to vaccines.

Dr. Michelle Penn-Marshall, Hampton University Vice President for Research, said the decision to provide support to Hampton VA Medical Center supports a priority of boosting vaccinations, however possible.

“As a Historically Black College and University we are trusted in the communities of color, so that assists in minimizing hesitancy,” she said. “We are going to work with VA to ensure that as many Veterans have the ability to get vaccinated can do so at this Convocation Center,” Penn-Marshall said.

Dr. Taquisa Simmons, Hampton VAMC Executive Director said, “the Johnson & Johnson shot provides more flexibility for Veterans who many do not have easy access to a second vaccination appointment”. She also stated that Hampton is here for the long haul and we hope to get as many Veterans through our system as possible at these locations.

In accordance with CDC guidelines, Hampton VAMC is currently offering vaccinations to enrolled Veterans 60 years of age and older. Hampton VAMC is pleased to be able to open things up and as things progress and supply increases, we will be able to do more.
A year ago, March 28, 2020, Marine Veteran and Salem VA Medical Center Housekeeper Charles Roy Toler Jr., made history in a most unenviable way — he became the first patient admitted to the Salem VA Medical Center High Consequence Infection (HCI) unit for COVID-19.

“I remember I had a cough that wouldn’t go away, and I kept it for about two weeks,” Toler recalls. “I get headaches, and the coughing aggravated the headaches and I wanted it to go away, and my wife said, ‘You might have COVID,’ so I checked into the ER not thinking I had it at all. I was just being a good soldier and doing what my wife told me to do.

“They (the ER staff) took me right in and I started feeling sick in the ER,” he continues. “They put me in a special room and about that time I felt like I had to throw up. So, I got up and the next thing I knew I was waking up on the floor — I had just passed out. But I got up and threw up in a trash can, which is where I was heading when I got up the first time.”

From that point, Toler was given a nasal swab and sent to the COVID unit.

“I had never seen the unit until that point,” Toler says, “and everybody is all dressed in PPE and gowns, and the doctor came in and introduced himself and then told me the worst-case scenario of what I could expect: worsening cough, rising fever. Fortunately, I didn’t get any of it. Then he told me, ‘If it comes down to it, I will stand on your chest and give you compressions. I won’t give up on you.’ He broke it all down Barney-style for me, which I appreciated. Sometimes you have to do that with Marines.”

While he was in the hospital, Toler’s wife and two daughters were worried that if he got COVID-19, they might get it as well. Realistically, he said, he probably had it for a couple weeks before coming to the ER, so there was concern for the rest of the family.

“They never had any symptoms. It’s strange, especially for my wife because we are in the same room at night, but apparently they have good immune systems.”

Toler would only spend a few days in the HCI unit before heading home to spend 14 days in quarantine.

“Honestly, that was more difficult than being in the hospital,” he remembers. “Fortunately, I had a separate room and bathroom, so I didn’t have to go into the other part of the house, and my wife gown up to bring me food and told me not to leave that room. Everyone was isolated from me — and I’m a family-oriented person, I’ve got to have everybody near me when I’m at home. You get used to a certain ebb and flow of things, and when that gets altered it throws you off — it was definitely the hardest part because I was at home but still couldn’t see them.”

Looking back from his one-year anniversary, Toler thinks the care he received at Salem was on par with any he would get in the community.

“The nurses were professional, and I tried to be a good patient,” he says. “I think they tried to match my sense of humor and it made it feel more natural to me because that’s how I vent my frustrations. My nurse that first day matched my personality and humor perfectly.

“I’d like to thank them all for putting up with me, and for their care and professionalism, and thanks to the doctor for being so straight-forward,” he offers. “To those people who might be not feeling well, get tested! You hear so much in the media about people putting it off until they’re in the hospital and it’s almost too late.

“At the first sign you think something might be a wee bit off, get tested,” Toler urges. “Yeah, it’s uncomfortable, but it only lasts a second and you’ve got peace of mind that if you do have it, you’ve hopefully caught it early, so it won’t be as big an issue than if you’d waited another month.”

A year after making history, Toler says he hasn’t had so much as a sniffle. “Knock on wood.”
'GREAT PRIDE IN THEIR WORK’ —
Charlottesville VA Clinic ‘a Godsend’ for Local Veterans

By Tim Parish  |  CENTRAL VIRGINIA VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

As the nationwide rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination continues — just recently, a new vaccine was granted Emergency Use Authorization by the Food and Drug Administration, with more vaccine variants in development — Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) is firing on all cylinders. With four vaccine clinics in operation at least five days a week, nearly 23,000 doses have been administered to Veterans, VA employees and volunteers since vaccinations began before Christmas last year.

For some, the vaccination appointment call could not have come soon enough, especially having already faced and survived one bout of COVID-19. James May Jr., the oldest WWII Veteran in the entirety of Orange County, Va., (population 36,010 as of 2019) received the first round of the Moderna vaccine March 2 at the Charlottesville VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), with Daughter Denise Gipson on his side. Though a recent fight with the coronavirus proved a “breeze” according to Denise, at nearly 97-years young, James May Jr. is one lucky man.

“I’m very, very glad. He had COVID back in November. We were very worried, but he did fantastic,” said Denise, who works with autistic school children in the local community. “We got very lucky, so when they called us for this, we said ‘How quick can you get him in?’ Because we knew it could happen again.”

May, who served in Europe during the war, came home to work in the construction industry, later selling insurance — born and raised in Orange County, May has relied on the VA for health care for years. Before CVHCS expanded services at the Charlottesville CBOC in February 2016, May travelled to the Richmond campus for many of his treatments. Since severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes COVID-19, began spreading across the U.S. last spring, nurses, doctors, administrators, emergency planners, maintenance and sanitation staff, screeners and medical support assistants with CVHCS have focused almost exclusively on the response to the pandemic. It has been an all-hands approach in response to an ever-shifting local, regional and national public health crisis.

Now, with the end hopefully coming into view as widespread vaccinations progress, the Charlottesville CBOC is meeting a critical need for Veterans residing west of the Commonwealth’s capital city. As of March 4, more than 900 Veterans have received at least one dose of the lifesaving Vaccine at the Charlottesville CBOC. The effort is a testament to the focus, care and commitment of the clinic’s staff. And according to retired pastor and U.S. Navy Veteran James Allison, who served aboard the USS Forrestal (CV-59) during the Vietnam War, Veterans have taken notice.

“It’s quite an honor; the whole VA system has been excellent for me,” said Allison, who served aboard the Forrestal as a gunners’ mate technician from 1969 through 1971. After returning home, Allison joined the textile industry before leading ministry at both the New Bern and Nortonville Churches of God. “I’ve gotten excellent service for everything they’ve offered to me, so I’m very appreciative of it.”

Now living in Dyke, roughly 20-miles north of C-Ville as it is sometimes called, Allison appreciates the systematic approach the CBOC staff have taken since they began the vaccination clinic the third week of January. While he was anxious to get in line for inoculation, Allison patiently awaited his turn in the vaccination chair.

“I think it’s very important that our active duty and health care workers get the vaccine, and I’m thankful that [CBOC staff] have a system set up to take care of those with critical issues and severe health issues,” said Allison. “And the VA was able to work with them first and move down the line. I’m grateful that I have very few health conditions, and I’m satisfied with the fact that I was able to wait for a while.”

With nearly 900 individual doses of the vaccine dispensed to this point, the Charlottesville CBOC staff have been putting as many shots in as many arms as possible for more than a month. The team effort extends outside the confines of the VA. CVHCS has a longstanding affiliation with Virginia Commonwealth University medicine — today, medical professionals-to-be are gaining firsthand experience as part of the nation’s largest, most expansive vaccination effort in history. The experience is unparalleled and the contributions invaluable, according to Vivian Vu, who will graduate from the VCU School of Pharmacy this May.

“I feel very honored to be included in such an important, memorable event in our history, and to be able to do this for our community of Veterans,” said Vu, who grew up in sunny Garden Grove, Calif. “I pursued a career in pharmacy to have opportunities such as this, and to be directly involved in patient care. It is a rewarding feeling to know that we are making a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable patients.”

For Vu, who graduated from University of California-Irvine with a degree in Sociology before moving east to VCU “for a change of scenery,” the teamwork within the Charlottesville CBOC vaccine clinic is indicative of the larger sense of purpose and commitment inside CVHCS as a whole. While the road is a long one, the horizon is coming into view, speeded by the united effort of so many caring health care professionals — and trainees.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7
“Everyone that I have worked with at the VA in Charlottesville has been incredibly supportive, knowledgeable, friendly, and takes great pride in their work,” said Vu, who began working the vaccine clinic only a few weeks ago. “At the vaccine clinic, we encourage teamwork by keeping open lines of communication, celebrating successes and working with individual strengths. The staff at our vaccine clinic have a very optimistic and supportive mentality. The positive work culture truly makes working at the VA such a dream. The overall consensus among our Veterans is the feeling of joy and relief that we are that much closer to getting back a bit of normality.”

Retired pastor and U.S. Navy Veteran James Allison, who served aboard the USS Forrestal (CV-59) during the Vietnam War, received his first COVID-19 vaccination at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) Charlottesville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), March 2, 2021. After serving aboard the Forrestal as a gunners’ mate technician from 1969 through 1971, Allison joined the textile industry before leading ministry at both the New Bern and Nortonville Churches of God. Allison, who lives in Dyke, Va., currently receives care as a VA patient at the Charlottesville CBOC. The Charlottesville vaccination clinic staff have been vaccinating Veterans since initiating the COVID-19 vaccine clinic in January of this year. To this point, nurses in the Charlottesville vaccine clinic have provided nearly 900 doses of the lifesaving vaccine for Veterans, employees, volunteers and caregivers. CVHCS began its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

Ninety-six-year-old WWII Veteran James May Jr. received his first COVID-19 vaccination at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) Charlottesville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), March 2, 2021. May is the oldest WWII Veteran living in Orange County, Va. After WWII, May worked in the construction industry and as an insurance salesman. May’s daughter, Denise Gipson, is grateful for the convenience of the Charlottesville CBOC for Veterans, and for the staff’s continued care for the Veterans of Central Virginia. “It’s wonderful; they have been a godsend for him,” said Gipson, who works with local autistic children as part of the school system. “We were having to go all the way to Richmond, but now a lot of things he can do right here. There are a lot of things that he still needs to go to the VA for, so it’s really good that they are here in Charlottesville, it’s so much closer.” The Charlottesville vaccination clinic staff have been vaccinating Veterans since initiating the COVID-19 vaccine clinic in January of this year. To this point, nurses in the Charlottesville vaccine clinic have provided nearly 900 doses of the lifesaving vaccine for Veterans, employees, volunteers and caregivers. CVHCS began its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

Denise Gipson and her 96-year-old father, WWII Veteran James May Jr., came to the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) Charlottesville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) for the COVID-19 vaccination March 2, 2021. May is the oldest WWII Veteran living in Orange County, Va. After WWII, May worked in the construction industry and as an insurance salesman. May’s daughter, Denise Gipson, is grateful for the convenience of the Charlottesville CBOC for Veterans, and for the staff’s continued care for the Veterans of Central Virginia. “It’s wonderful, they have been a
Virginia Commonwealth University pharmacy student Vivian Vu assists COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic staff at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) Charlottesville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), March 2, 2021. Vu, a native of Garden Grove, Calif., graduated from the University of California-Irvine with a degree in sociology before moving on to Virginia Commonwealth University School of Pharmacy — where she is slated to graduate in May this year. She began working with the Charlottesville CBOC Vaccine Clinic staff last month. The Charlottesville vaccination clinic staff have been vaccinating Veterans since initiating the COVID-19 vaccine clinic in January of this year. To this point, nurses in the Charlottesville vaccine clinic have provided nearly 900 doses of the lifesaving vaccine for Veterans, employees, volunteers and caregivers. CVHCS began its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. (CVHCS Photo by Tim Parish/Released)
SAVE LIVES Act Allows VA to Soon Provide COVID-19 Vaccinations to All Veterans, Their Spouses and Caregivers

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden signed the SAVE LIVES Act into law today, expanding VA’s legal authority to provide COVID-19 vaccines to all Veterans, regardless of their VA health care enrollment status, as well as Veteran spouses, caregivers and some beneficiaries.

The SAVE LIVES Act removed some of the legal limits on the medical care VA can provide to Veterans, based on health care eligibility and priority groups.

The expanded authority depends on readily available COVID-19 vaccine supply and requires VA to continue to prioritize vaccinations and healthcare delivery for our nation’s Veterans enrolled in VA care.

"The SAVE LIVES Act increases the number of individuals who are eligible to get lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines from VA from 9.5 million to more than 33 million," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "Meeting the task of vaccinating this expanded population will be a tremendous undertaking for the VA, and will require a significant increase in our allocation of vaccine supply, but I am confident that VA’s workforce is up to the task."

VA is providing COVID-19 vaccinations to Veterans and employees per its COVID-19 Vaccination Plan. As of March 24, VA has fully vaccinated 1,994,812 individuals, including Veterans, VA employees and federal partners.

The next steps in VA’s prioritized expansion efforts are to offer the vaccine to all enrolled Veterans — approximately 9.5 million — followed by those outlined in the bill, as vaccine supply permits:

- Non-enrolled Veterans as defined in the new legislation, including those without service-connected disabilities and who have incomes above VA’s threshold.
- Overseas Veterans who rely on the Foreign Medical Program.
- Veteran caregivers who are enrolled in either the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers or the Program of General Caregiver Support Services.
- Veteran caregivers enrolled in certain Geriatrics and Extended Care Programs, such as Veteran Directed Care, Bowel and Bladder, Home Based Primary Care and VA’s Medical Foster Home Program.
- Civilian Health and Medical Programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs recipients, Veteran spouses.

In March and April 2021, VA will conduct pilots of COVID-19 vaccination for individuals specified in HR1276 at select VA medical centers. These pilots will work through critical steps in the process including communications, operations including space and staffing, systems for registration, enrollment, and scheduling, documentation, and data transmission.

VA currently receives approximately 200,000 first, or single doses, of COVID-19 vaccine each week. VA estimates that it will need a minimum of 300,000 first or single doses of COVID-19 vaccine weekly to offer COVID-19 vaccination to an additional 3 million Veterans who are enrolled but not currently using VA health care. VA estimates that it will need approximately 600,000 first, or single doses, of COVID-19 vaccine each week to further expand vaccination to all individuals outlined in HR1276. First or single dose supply is the best indicator of VA’s capacity to offer expanded COVID-19 vaccination.

Interested Veterans, their caregivers and Veteran spouses who qualify under the legislation can click here to get more information about COVID-19 vaccines at VA. Updates will be provided regarding the availability of vaccine supply and other resources.
VA Extending Debt Relief for Veterans

VA is extending debt relief for Veterans through Sept. 30, 2022, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. VA will suspend collection of all Veteran benefit overpayments incurred between April 6, 2020, and Sept. 30, 2021. No adverse actions or collection attempts will occur during this suspension period. Additionally, all copayments for medical care and pharmacy services incurred from April 6, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2021, will be cancelled, along with any fees or interest. Any payments for this time period will be refunded.

VA is committed to keeping Veterans informed about their debt and the expansive relief options available.

What will happen next
With regard to benefit overpayments, Veterans will receive a letter from the VA Debt Management Center (DMC) showing current debt amount as well as available options. Subsequent letters will be sent showing updates to Veterans’ accounts.

What Veterans can do now
For benefit overpayments, no action is required through Sept. 30, 2022. That said, if Veterans would like to resolve debts sooner, there are options they can exercise now. VA can work with Veterans to determine what option is best. Options include:

- Making a payment
- Establishing a repayment plan
- Submitting a compromise offer
- Disputing the debt
- Requesting a waiver

For benefit debt, information is available online at https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/revenue_ops/Financial_Hardship.asp or call the Health Resource Center at 866-400-1238, or by calling the DMC at 866-400-1238. Veterans can also contact the Health Resource Center at 866-400-1238 from 6:00am-6:00pm CT Monday through Friday. Visit https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask/ to submit your request online.

Contact information

- For questions about VA benefit debt, including information on how to make voluntary repayment arrangements, or for information about how to request a waiver, how to dispute a debt, or how to submit a compromise offer, call the DMC (800-827-0648) from 6:00am-6:00pm CT Monday through Friday. Visit https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask/ to submit your request online.
- For medical care copayment questions, please contact the Health Resource Center at (866-400-1238) from 7:00am to 7:00pm CT Monday through Friday.
- For questions on debts referred to Treasury, contact the Treasury Cross-Servicing Program (888-826-3127) or the Treasury Offset Program (800-304-3107).

VA is here to help Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please follow national and local guidelines to stay healthy and safe.

*This post was updated 3/25/21 with additional medical care and pharmacy services information.
VA Suicide Prevention Tool Puts Lifesaving Information in R.E.A.C.H.

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a mobile app, March 18, that offers step-by-step guidance for those who are trying to support someone they care about and for those who are concerned about their own emotional wellbeing.

Developed by the PREVENTS Office, the How We R.E.A.C.H. Coaching Tool includes five actions to take when R.E.A.C.H.ing out to someone in need or when you are R.E.A.C.H.ing out for help for yourself. It provides additional resource information and suggested language to use when starting what are often very difficult conversations.

When we R.E.A.C.H. to those in need, we:

• R – Reach out and ask, “How are you ... really?” Listen and offer hope.
• E – Engage them about possible risk factors and changes in their life to better understand their pain.
• A – Attend to their safety. Unless you are concerned about your safety, stay with them.
• C – Connect them to resources such as supportive friends and family, professionals or a crisis line.
• H – Help them make and maintain a plan to stay safe. Encourage them to share it with others.

When we R.E.A.C.H. because we are hurting, we:

• R – Reach to a loved one or someone we trust. Don’t be afraid to reach out — now.
• E – Engage those we trust and discuss life changes and risk factors that are contributing to our pain.
• A – Attend to our safety. Contact someone who can be with us and help us stay safe.
• C – Connect with family, friends or appropriate professionals. Contact a crisis line and be honest so they can help.
• H – Help others understand how they can help us stay safe. Share a safety plan if we have one.

“The How We R.E.A.C.H. Coaching Tool empowers everyone with basic information so they can take the necessary critical steps to provide — or receive — help and hope,” said PREVENTS Executive Director Barbara Van Dahlen, Ph.D. “It puts this important information at our fingertips, on our phones, giving people the confidence to reach out for themselves, to friends and loved ones, to ensure they get the support they deserve.”

The tool is a key component of R.E.A.C.H., the first ever national public health campaign focused on suicide prevention. Established in July 2020, R.E.A.C.H. aims to engage everyone with the goal of changing the culture of mental health and preventing suicide among Veterans and all Americans.

It was developed with the help of military and Veterans Service Organizations, and in collaboration with other organizations that have pledged to assist with the dissemination of this potentially lifesaving app. Download the How We R.E.A.C.H. Coaching Tool.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day.

VA Allocates $1B to Aid State Veteran Homes Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it will make grants totaling $1 billion to State Veterans Homes operated across the country to ensure that residents continue to receive high quality care, live in modern, safe facilities, and are protected from the COVID-19 pandemic.

VA is appreciative to Congress for providing the funding for these grants in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act as amended by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021.

“Too many Veterans residing in State Veterans Homes have suffered greatly during this challenging pandemic, and it’s vital that we do everything within our power to help them through these tough times,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “We are working to ensure our Veterans are protected and that their state-run homes are well equipped for the challenges ahead.”

Source and allocation of funds:

• $250 million from ARP designated for grants related to operating needs based on each state’s share of total Veteran residents in nursing home and domiciliary care.
• $50 million from CARES Act designated for grants for capital needs for construction funds to modify buildings to prepare, prevent or respond in order to mitigate the risk of COVID-19.
• $100 million designated by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, for grants for emergency payments to existing State Veterans Homes to prevent, prepare and respond to COVID-19.

Learn more about State Veterans Homes.
### MEDICAL CENTERS

- **Asheville VAMC**
  - 1010 Tunnel Road
  - Asheville, NC 28803
  - 828-250-7911 | 800-822-3480
  - www.asheville.va.gov

- **Durham VAMC**
  - 300 Fuller Street
  - Durham, NC 27705
  - 919-286-0411 | 800-870-8880
  - www.durham.va.gov

- **Fayetteville VAMC**
  - 2300 Ramsey Street
  - Fayetteville, NC 28310
  - 910-480-2100 | 800-711-0766
  - www.fayetteville.va.gov

- **Hampton VAMC**
  - 1000 Colonel Guion Blvd.
  - Hampton, VA 23686
  - 757-722-9881 | 866-544-9881
  - www.hampton.va.gov

- **Richmond VAMC**
  - 1200 Broad Rock Blvd.
  - Richmond, VA 23224
  - 804-675-5100 | 800-704-0301
  - www.richmond.va.gov

- **Salem VAMC**
  - 1810 Roanoke Blvd.
  - Salem, VA 24153
  - 540-382-2463 | 888-891-2463
  - www.salem.va.gov

- **Salisbury VAMC**
  - 1800 Bannerman Ave.
  - Salisbury, MD 21804
  - 410-638-3900 | 800-899-9566
  - www.salisbury.va.gov

### OUTPATIENT CLINICS

- **Albemarle CBOC**
  - 1845 W City Drive
  - Elizabeth City, NC 27906
  - 251-331-7071

- **Brunswick County CBOC**
  - 18 Doctors Dr., Bolivia 28422
  - Supply, NC 28462 | 910-754-6140

- **Charlotte CBOC**
  - 8800 University East Drive
  - Charlotte, NC 28213
  - 704-597-3500

- **Charlotte HCC**
  - 2500 W. Tryon Rd.
  - Charlotte, NC 28208
  - 704-229-1300

- **Charlottesville CBOC**
  - 500 Peter Jefferson Pkwy
  - Charlottesville, VA 22911
  - 434-593-3080

- **Chesapeake CBOC**
  - 3715 S. Military Highway
  - Chesapeake, VA 23320
  - 757-722-9861

- **Clayton CBOC**
  - 18313 US Hwy 70 Business Highway West, Suite 100 & 200
  - Clayton, NC 27520

- **Danville CBOC**
  - 705 Piney Forest Rd.
  - Danville, VA 24504
  - 434-710-1400

- **Emporia CBOC**
  - 1746 East Atlantic Street
  - Emporia, VA 23847
  - 434-348-1500

- **Fayetteville HCC**
  - 7300 S. Raeford Rd.
  - Fayetteville NC 28304
  - 910-498-2190 | 800-711-0766

- **Fayetteville Rehabilitation Clinic**
  - 4301 Raeford Rd. 
  - Fayetteville, NC 28304
  - 910-908-2222

- **Franklin CBOC**
  - 647 Weyant Street
  - Franklin, VA 23043
  - 804-675-7222

- **Fredericksburg CBOC**
  - 3041 Spaldylvania Ave, Ste 300
  - Fredericksburg, VA 22408
  - 540-370-4408

- **Fredericksburg at Southpoint CBOC**
  - 3041 Spaldylvania Ave, Ste 300
  - Fredericksburg, VA 22408
  - 540-370-4408

- **Goldboro CBOC**
  - 2960 Hospital Road
  - Goldsboro, NC 27530
  - 919-730-4000

- **Greeneville CBOC**
  - 401 Ramsey Blvd.
  - Greeneville, TN 37743
  - 423-863-2100

- **Hamlet CBOC**
  - 100 Jefferson Street
  - Hamlet, NC 28345
  - 910-580-3536

- **Hickory CBOC**
  - 2400 Century Place, Ste 1
  - Hickory, NC 28603
  - 828-431-1600

- **Hillandale Rd. Annex**
  - 1014 Hillandale Road Durham
  - North Carolina 27705
  - 919-600-3077

- **Jacksonville CBOC**
  - 2500 Henderson Drive
  - Jacksonville, NC 28546
  - 910-253-6408

- **Jacksonville 2 VA Clinic**
  - 306 Bryden Main Road
  - Jacksonville, NC 28546
  - 910-253-6408

- **Jacksonville 3 VA Clinic**
  - 4 Bath Court
  - Jacksonville, NC 28546
  - 910-253-6408

- **Kernersville CBOC**
  - 1065 Kernersville Medical Pkwy
  - Kernersville, NC 27207
  - 336-315-5000

- **Lynchburg CBOC**
  - 1600 Lamarside Drive
  - Lynchburg, VA 24501
  - 434-308-5000

- **Morehead City CBOC**
  - 5401 U.S. 70
  - Morehead City, NC 28557
  - 252-240-2230

- **Raleigh CBOC**
  - 3305 Sungate Blvd.
  - Raleigh, NC 27610
  - 919-212-0619

- **Raleigh II Annex**
  - 3040 Hammond Business Place
  - Raleigh, NC 27603
  - 919-099-3789

- **Raleigh III CBOC**
  - 2608 Atlantic Ave, Ste 200
  - Raleigh, NC 27604
  - 919-715-2500

- **Robeson County CBOC**
  - 133 Three Hunts Drive
  - Pembroke, NC 28371

- **Rutherford County CBOC**
  - 2720 College Avenue, Suite 145
  - Forest City, NC 28043-2450
  - 704-208-2780

- **Sanford CBOC**
  - 3112 Tramway Road
  - Sanford, NC 27322
  - 919-715-0100

- **Staunton CBOC**
  - 152 Legacy Circle
  - Staunton, VA 24401
  - 540-986-5777

- **Tazewell CBOC**
  - 141 Bonetti Ave.
  - Tazewell, VA 24651
  - 271-908-3000

- **Virginia Beach CBOC**
  - 344 Chandler Road
  - Virginia Beach, VA 23461
  - 757-772-0981

- **Wilmington HCC**
  - 1726 Garnet Rd.
  - Wilmington, NC 28405
  - 910-342-3100

- **Winston-Salem CBOC**
  - 165 Pugh Ferry Rd.
  - Winston-Salem, NC 27103
  - 336-223-5480

### DIALYSIS CENTERS

- **VA Dialysis Clinic Fayetteville**
  - 5301 Robinson Street, Ste 101
  - Fayetteville, NC 28303, 910-483-0727

- **VA Dialysis Clinic Fayetteville**
  - 1021 W.W. Smith Blvd.
  - Greensboro, NC 27403
  - 336-333-5306

- **Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center**
  - 110-A Branchwood Drive
  - Jacksonville, NC 28546
  - 919-577-1100

- **Norfolk Vet Center**
  - 1710 Church Street
  - Norfolk, VA 23504
  - 757-803-7504

- **Raleigh Vet Center**
  - 8801 Ellerton Lane
  - Raleigh, NC 27617
  - (919) 361-6410

- **Raleigh Vet Center**
  - 2114 Ben Craig Dr.
  - Raleigh, NC 27605
  - 919-775-6160

- **Southport Circle, Suite 102**
  - Virginia Beach, VA 23452
  - 757-549-3086