

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL



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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

VA LAUNCHES NEW PSA ON SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR VETERANS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reaching out to veterans in crisis and their families in a new public service announcement (PSA) to raise awareness about suicide prevention resources, such as the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The new television spot encourages veterans in crisis to call the crisis hotline number at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and then push 1 on their telephone keypad to reach a trained VA mental health professional who can assist the veteran 24 hours a day, seven days a week

So far, more than 379,000 people have called the hotline, and more than 200,000 of these callers have identified themselves as veterans, family members or friends of veterans. The hotline has led to more than 13,000 rescues of actively suicidal veterans.

The hotline also operates an online Veterans Chat program, which provides veterans, their families and friends with the ability to communicate anonymously online in real-time with a trained VA mental health professional. Veterans Chat can be accessed through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's web page at <http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans/Default.aspx>.

Through the hotline and Veterans Chat, VA can connect veterans and their families with important services, including suicide prevention coordinators, as well as general inpatient and outpatient psychiatric services at VA medical centers and community-based outpatient clinics.

The PSA can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/user/VeteransHealthAdmin#p/u/1/PPL7CAHixQE>.

VA'S CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM EXPANDING (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is expanding support nationally to caregivers of veterans with Alzheimer's disease. A pilot program of the REACH VA (Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer's Caregiver Health in VA) program showed

great success in reducing stress on caregivers while improving care outcomes for the veterans. REACH VA involved 127 caregivers connected to 24 VA medical centers. The median age for the caregiver was 72 and the majority of the participants were spouses.

Typical issues caregivers face when caring for veterans with Alzheimer's disease and dementia include memory problems, behavior problems and the need to provide basic attendance such as grooming assistance. Caregivers typically reported feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, cut off from family and friends, lonely, prone to bouts of crying and having worse physical health than the year before.

For six months, the REACH VA caregivers were provided 12 individual in-home and telephone counseling sessions; five telephone support group sessions; a caregiver quick guide with 48 behavioral and stress topics; education on safety and patient behavior management; and training for their individual health and well being. Caregivers saw their burden reduced; drops in depressive symptoms and their related daily impacts; fewer frustrations, including those that have clinical potential for abuse; and decreases in dementia-related behaviors from the veterans they cared for. Caregivers also reported they were able to spend fewer hours per day devoted to caregiving duties.

VA will roll out REACH VA on a national basis through home-based primary care programs across the country. In addition, the program will be modified to assist caregivers of veterans with other diagnoses like spinal cord injury and traumatic brain injury.

REACH VA is the first national clinical implementation of a proven behavioral intervention for stressed and burdened dementia caregivers.

Local caregiver support coordinators are available to assist veterans of all eras and their caregivers in understanding and applying for VA's many caregiver benefits. VA also features a website, www.caregiver.va.gov, with general information on REACH VA and other caregiver support programs available through VA and the community.

VA EXTENDS POST-INCARCERATION HEALTH CARE

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – VA will extend health care to eligible veterans in halfway houses and other temporary, post-incarceration housing under a new program aimed at cutting back on repeat offenses. A long-standing rule has barred VA from providing health care to veterans for whom another federal, state or local government has an obligation to provide health care. Frequently, that means inmates of prisons and jails. Under the changed rule, that prohibition would be amended and VA would be allowed to provide health care to veterans in halfway houses and other temporary, post-incarceration housing.

An Urban Institute study in 2008 found that good health care in the first months of community reentry played a key role in easing readjustment and reducing recidivism.

About 29,000-56,000 veterans are released annually from state and federal prisons, and at least 90,000 veterans are released each year from city and county jails, according to Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics.

SCHOOLS ENCOURAGED TO JOIN VA'S YELLOW RIBBON PROGRAM

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – Colleges and universities are encouraged to join the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in participating in the Post-9/11 GI Bill Yellow Ribbon Program for the upcoming 2011-2012 academic year. The Yellow Ribbon Program is a provision of the Post-9/11 GI Bill that allows degree-granting institutions to voluntarily enter into a formal agreement with VA to fund tuition and fee expenses that exceed either the annual \$17,500 private institutions cap recently instituted by Congress or the in-state tuition and fees charged out-of-state residents attending public institutions. The institution can contribute up to 50 percent of those expenses and VA will match this additional funding for eligible students. This may enable qualified students to attend school tuition-free. Interested school officials should visit VA's Web site for more information at <http://gibill.va.gov/school-certifying-officials/yellow-ribbon-agreement>. For the 2010-2011 academic year, VA signed more than 1,200 Yellow Ribbon agreements across the nation. For a complete listing of the schools presently participating, go to www.gibill.va.gov/GI_Bill_Info/CH33/YRP/YRP_List.htm.

Effective Aug. 1, 2011, under a new law passed by Congress, there is a cap on the maximum payment of tuition and fees at \$17,500 per academic year for private and foreign schools, a change from the previous Post-9/11 GI Bill. The law also provides for full payment of in-state tuition and fees (undergraduate, graduate or doctoral) at public institutions.

Additional information about the Post-9/11 GI Bill, including upcoming changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill based on recent legislation can be obtained by visiting VA's Web site at www.gibill.va.gov and www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/post_911_gibill/Post911_change_s.html or by calling 1-888-GIBILL-1 (or 1-888-442-4551).

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255**

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489

4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846

9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): <http://va.reotrans.com/>

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans' Affairs: www.FloridaVets.org

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov