

Health Trends

A Quarterly Newsletter for the Northern Arizona VA Health Care System ■ VISN 18

Long-term Care Programs

For Veterans who may need some form of long-term care, either on a temporary or permanent basis, the VA offers a wide range of programs. They include home and community based services, plus nursing homes and residential accommodations.

Home and Community Based Care

Veteran-Directed Home and Community Based Services gives Veterans of all ages the opportunity to receive the services they need in a consumer-directed way. Veterans in this program are given a flexible budget for services that can be managed by the Veteran or the family caregiver. Veteran-Directed Care can be used to help Veterans continue to live at home or in their community.

Among these programs are:

- **Adult Day Health Care**, where Veterans can go to during the day for social activities, peer support, companionship, and recreation.
- **Home Based Primary Care** which is provided to Veterans in their home. A VA physician supervises the health care team providing the services. This service is for Veterans with complex health care needs for whom routine clinic-

based care is not effective.

- **A Homemaker or Home Health Aide**, who can come to a Veteran's home and help with personal care and daily activities. These aides are not nurses, but are supervised by a registered nurse who will help assess the Veteran's daily living needs.
- **Skilled Home Health Care**, short-term health care services that can be provided to Veterans who are homebound or live far away from VA. The care is delivered by a community-based home health agency that contracts with VA.
- **Home Telehealth Care**, which allows the Veteran's physician or nurse to monitor the Veteran's medical condition remotely using home monitoring equipment.



- **Respite Care**, that pays for a person to come to a Veteran's home or for a Veteran to go to a program while the family caregiver can run errands or go out of town for a few days without leaving the Veteran alone at home.
- **Hospice Care**, for Veterans who have a terminal condition with six months or less to live.
- **Palliative Care**, a form of treatment that emphasizes comfort care but does not require the Veteran to have a terminal condition.

continued on page 2

Long-term Care

continued from page 1

Nursing Home and Residential Care

The available programs include:

- **Community Living Centers (VA Nursing Homes)**, which, unlike many nursing homes in the past, resemble “home” as much as possible, with activities for Veterans of all ages. There are family friendly places for visiting, and pets are welcome. Veterans are invited to decorate their rooms. They may stay for a short time or, in rare instances, for the rest of their lives.
- **Community Nursing Homes**, where Veterans can live full time and receive skilled nursing care around the clock. The program, operating under VA contract, is offered in many communities so Veterans can receive care near



- their homes and families.
- **State Veterans Homes**, certified by the VA, provide nursing home, domiciliary or adult day care. They are owned, operated and managed by state governments.
 - **Medical Foster Homes**, inspected and approved by the VA, are private homes with a trained caregiver on duty around the clock. While living there, Veterans receive Home Based Primary Care services.
 - **Adult Family Homes**, where Veterans can live in a rented room with shared common spaces. A trained caregiver is on duty around the clock.
 - **Assisted Living Facilities**, where Veterans can live in a rented room or apartment. There are some shared living spaces, like a dining room. There is a trained caregiver on duty at all times.

For more information about any of these long-term care programs, please visit the VA website at: www.va.gov/geriatrics/Guide/LongTermCare/Nursing_Home_and_Residential_Services.asp. ■

Volunteers Play a Key Role in Serving Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) was founded in 1946 to provide for our nation’s veterans while they are cared for by VA health care facilities. Today, it’s one of the largest centralized volunteer programs in the Federal government.

More than 350 organizations support VAVS, and volunteers have provided over 736 million hours of service since its founding.

Last year alone, volunteers contributed more than 12.3 million hours of service to Veterans.

“It is impossible to calculate the amount of caring and sharing that these VAVS volunteers provide to veteran patients,” said Laura S. Balun, who has served as Director of the Volunteer Service Office since 2005. Our VAVS volunteers are a priceless asset to the Nation’s Veterans and to the

Department of Veterans Affairs.” The vast majority of VA volunteers work at VA hospitals, but volunteers also assist VA national cemeteries and regional benefits offices.

At medical centers, their roles range from traditional ones, such as escorting patients and assisting in recreation activities, to nontraditional assignments outside of medical centers in such programs as hospice care

Million Veteran Program Growing

The Department of Veterans Affairs Million Veteran Program (MVP) recently enrolled its 100,000th volunteer research participant, and now stands at more than 110,000 enrollees, marking a major milestone in the nearly 90-year history of VA research.

“MVP is a truly historic effort, in terms of both VA research and medical research in general,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “Veterans nationwide are helping to create a database that has the potential to help millions around the country – Veteran and non-Veteran alike. They are continuing to serve the nation well beyond the time they stopped wearing the uniform.”

MVP aims to enroll as many as one million Veterans over the next

five to seven years. Participants will be asked to complete a one-time study visit (approximately 20 minutes in length) to provide a blood sample for genetic analysis. Participation also includes filling out health surveys, allowing ongoing access to medical records and agreeing to future contact. This research program will establish one of the largest databases of genes and health history. The results of MVP may lead to new ways of preventing and treating common illness.

By participating in MVP, Veterans will help contribute to the knowledge base that may result in developing personalized treatments for military-related illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as more common illnesses, like diabetes and heart disease. Results from MVP will help

improve health care for Veterans and all Americans.

Veterans’ privacy and confidentiality are top priorities in MVP, as in all VA research. Rigorous measures are taken to protect MVP participants’ personal information, including secure storage of data and samples using a bar-code system. Researchers approved for access to MVP data do not receive the name, date of birth, social security number, or address of participating Veterans. Furthermore, authorized researchers conduct their analyses only within VA’s secure, centralized computing environment, known as GenISIS (Genomic Information System for Integrated Science).

For more information about MVP, visit www.research.va.gov/MVP. ■

and home-based primary care. Opportunities for medical center volunteers also exist in patient education, advocacy and services supporting patient care.

At cemeteries, volunteers provide military honors at burial services, plant trees and flowers, and place flags on graves for Memorial Day and Veterans Day. ■



BECOMING A VOLUNTEER



Anyone interested in becoming a VAVS volunteer can do so in one of two ways:

1. Contact the Department of Veterans Affairs facility nearest you. Ask for Voluntary Service. Tell the staff of your interest in becoming a VAVS Volunteer. The staff will take care of everything else, including your interview, orientation, and assignment! To find the facility nearest you, go to the following website www.volunteer.va.gov/, and click on the “Volunteer and Donate” link.
2. Or fill out the Volunteer Now! form on the same site. Someone from your local VAVS office will contact you with additional information.

Immunizations and Health Screenings

Today's Veteran Health Care System is working at maintaining and even improving a good state of health among our Veteran population. Being involved in your own health care is an important part of healthy living. One of the best ways to be involved is to know more about the health screenings and immunizations your health care team offers.

Whether you call them "shots" or vaccines, your need for immunizations does not end when you reach adulthood. With time, immunity from childhood vaccines can fade, and you may be at risk for new and different diseases too. Your specific need is determined by such factors as age, lifestyle, high-risk conditions, type and location of travel, and previous immunizations.

In any case, you need continuing protection against:

- Seasonal influenza (flu);

- Tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough) (if you haven't received the Tdap vaccine);
- Shingles (adults 60 and older);
- Pneumonia, (adults 65 and older, and adults with specific health issues);
- Hepatitis B infection (adults with diabetes or at risk for Hep B).

Be sure to ask your health care team about other vaccines you may need.

Another important way to maintain or improve your health is through health screening tests. These tests are used to obtain more information about health problems and perhaps make us aware of the potential risk for future health problems or diseases. Most Veterans should be screened for: alcohol abuse; depression; high blood pressure; HIV; military sexual trauma; obesity; PTSD; and tobacco use.



The VA also recommends other screening tests based on age, gender, health status, and family history. These tests might include: lipid disorders; breast cancer; colorectal cancer; Hepatitis B and C; Chlamydia and Gonorrhea genital infections; and Osteoporosis.

Be an active member of your health care team. Talk with them about the screening tests and immunizations that are right for you. ■