



VETERAN HEALTH NEWS

VA SAN DIEGO HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Feb. 2020

Health Care for Blue Water Navy Veterans



Did you serve on a Blue Water Navy (BWN) vessel offshore of the Republic of Vietnam, or on another U.S. Navy or Coast Guard ship operating in the coastal waterways of Vietnam, between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975? If yes, you may have had contact with Agent Orange, an herbicide used to clear trees and plants during the war. We refer to this as a 'presumption of contact.' Blue Water Navy Veterans are now entitled to a presumption of service connection for illnesses related to Agent Orange exposure. This is a result of Public Law 116-23, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019. The law was signed on June 25, 2019 and took effect on January 1, 2020.

If you are a Blue Water Navy Veteran, you may be eligible for VA health care. To apply for health care benefits, you can enroll as a walk-in, with an appointment, or online. BWN will need a DD-214 to verify their claim. New enrollees with no service-connected disabilities will automatic be placed in prior group 6 upon verification of eligibility. BWN Vets do not have to file a claim with VBA to be eligible for VA medical.

Veterans can enroll at the medical center or any of our community clinics. VA San Diego Healthcare System Health Benefits & Enrollment: (858) 552-7523 or see our web page: <https://www.sandiego.va.gov/patients/eligibility.asp>

North County Stand Down



VA San Diego Healthcare System is teaming up with local partners to serve San Diego Homeless Veterans living in North County at the 4th annual Stand Down from Feb 6 – 9 at Greek Oak Ranch in Vista.

Medical staff provide a wide variety of services such as wound care, foot care, vaccinations, Hep-C and HIV testing, counseling, pharmaceuticals, among other acute or chronic issues they may be experiencing.

The VA staff volunteer to work in this alternate care environment because of the differences they see in the lives they come across. “Providing accessible treatment and giving personal attention to homeless Veteran needs is our goal with the hope that we’ve improved the quality of life for these heroes,” said Robert West, organizer for VA Medical Care during the event.

For more information, please visit <https://www.ncstanddown.org/>

Diabetes Prevention Program



The Diabetes Education Program has exciting news! If you have pre-diabetes or think you are at risk for diabetes, you are invited to join the six-month Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP). The DPP includes 15 sessions that begin April 1st and ends September 23rd, 2020 and feature a variety of topics with the focus being activity, nutrition, stress management, and weight loss. The education offered is designed to support lifestyle changes to improve your health and ultimately lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

This will be the fifth DPP group at the VA San Diego Healthcare System. The veterans who completed the education series have had great success! Most were able to lose weight and had improvement in their blood sugar trends and cholesterols. If you join the program, you may experience the same health benefits!

For more Information, contact one of the Diabetes Educators on the number listed below.

When: Wednesdays at 1:30-2:30pm

Where: Patient Classroom on 1 East, Room #1493 at the Medical Center La Jolla

Contact information: Diabetes Educators at 858-552-8585 x7338 or x7245

VetResources Helps Families Find Deals for Them

Since VetResources began last year, nearly 100 million people have clicked on the site, with 12 million accessing the resources available. That's hundreds of thousands of free event tickets, premium subscriptions, audio books, National Park passes, video games, Walgreens Flu shots, and so much more!

Thousands have already shared VetResources, and if you haven't already please share it with your Veteran friends and supporters. Our goal is share VA and non-VA resources with all Veterans, their Families, Caregivers, and Survivors.

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USVA/bulletins/27637cf>

Join the Million Veteran Program Today



More than 800,000 Veteran partners have already joined the Million Veteran Program, a national, voluntary, research initiative that helps VA study how genes affect the health of Veterans. Over 21,000 of those Veterans reside within San Diego County. MVP is helping improve health care by studying genetics, health records, and surveys to understand how genes affect the health of Veterans. The national program is entirely voluntary and has already begun to lead to a better understanding of the role genes play in many common illnesses, especially those common among Veterans, such as PTSD.

San Diego's own Dr. Murray Stein recently published his findings (<https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp.2019.19030256>) on the comorbidities with mental health disorders such as anxiety and PTSD in *The American Journal of Psychiatry* on January 7, 2020. Researchers who are approved access to analyze MVP samples and data do not receive names, address, date of birth, or social security numbers of Veteran partners. The security and confidentiality of data are MVP's top priorities. DNA samples and health information are all coded and only limited staff have access to the key.

For more information about the Million Veteran Program, visit MVP Online at <https://www.mvp.va.gov> or call the MVP Info Center at 1-866-441-6075 to schedule an appointment in person with Natalie Morales or Rosalinda Cruz at a VA facility near you in San Diego County.

Get Help for Substance Abuse



Most people in our society can use alcohol and drugs in a socially-appropriate manner or as prescribed by their medical provider. But for others, alcohol and drug use may be problematic due to genetics and/or stress of coping with the symptoms of pain, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, PTSD, or other mental health conditions.

Sustained misuse of alcohol and drugs can lead to Substance Use Disorders (SUD), leading to serious health, relationship, employment, and legal problems.

The symptoms of **Substance Use Disorders** may include:

- Cravings or urges to use alcohol or drugs
- Needing more of the substance to get the desired effect (tolerance)
- Feeling sick when drinking or drug use stops (withdrawal)
- Giving up major life activities due to substance use
- An inability to stop drinking or using drugs despite negative consequences

Fortunately, there are proven ways to help Veterans recover from these issues through VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) support.

The VASDHS **Alcohol Drug Treatment Program** provides treatment options for substance abuse. Examples of treatment options include: a residential 28-day program, Intensive Outpatient, outpatient groups, aftercare groups, and medication-assisted therapy. Friends and loved ones can participate in the Family and Friends Group.

As many as half of those with mental health issues abuse substances, thus complicating the assessment and treatment of both problems. VASHSD offers a special program for Veterans with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders. Substance Abuse Mental Illness (SAMI) is primarily a group-based program that addresses both.

If you know a Veteran who needs help, please encourage them to call **858-642-3391** to make an appointment with an Addiction Therapist for an Assessment, so that treatment options can be discussed and planned out.

Mental Health Care Job Fair

The Mental Health Care Line has the following positions available for interested applicants at our upcoming job fair:

- Advanced Medical Support Assistants
- Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor
- Program Support Assistants
- Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners
- Registered Nurses
- Social Workers

For more information, contact Kathleen at Kathleen.Lytle@va.gov or (858) 642-1207.

How Does Your Hospital Compare?



Effective December 11, 2019, all VA medical center web sites added a link to a VA site that compares local medical center performance. Just go to the front page of the VA San Diego Healthcare System and select the “compare your VA facility” button on the home page grey left side bar. There you will find the information for San Diego VA on timeliness, quality and Veteran satisfaction:

- wait times for appointments by location (medical center or clinics)
- same day services available
- Hospital Compare data (compares VA facilities to other hospitals in the area)
- Outpatient Compare data (how do individual VA facilities compare to other clinics in the area?)
- Nursing home compare
- Patient Experience Compare data
- VA facility quality data
- Veteran satisfaction (patients reported they were always or usually able to get an appointment when needed for primary care (routine).

The topics covered on the site assess patients' perceptions of their healthcare experience using the Consumer Assessment of Health Providers and Systems (CAHPS) Survey, which is the health care industry standard. These topics were identified by patients as important, and focus on aspects of healthcare that they, the patients, are best qualified to assess. These topics include things such as the communication skills of providers and ease of access to healthcare services.

For more information, see

<https://www.va.gov/QUALITYOFCARE/apps/shep/barchart.asp>

We strive every day to improve our care and service. If you receive a survey, please complete it with honest feedback. We need to hear about your experience with VASDHS so we can continue to improve.

Get Instant Updates Through GovDelivery



Get all the latest in VA San Diego feature stories, newsletters and information by registering with our GovDelivery service. To participate, go to our internet homepage and enter your email in the box “Connect with VA San Diego Healthcare System.”

Research Opportunities

Help us advance the science of health care by volunteering for a human subject research project at VA San Diego Healthcare System. More information can be found [here](#).

Appointment Access



Appt. wait times: Primary Care: 4.3 days
 (completed appts as of 12/31/19) Specialty Care: 8.95 days
 Mental Health: 4.37 days

Choice referrals: In fiscal year 2019, VASDHS referred Veterans to the community for care at a total cost of **\$113,415,012**.

Calendar

National Wear Red Day: Jan. 7
North County Stand Down, VISTA: Feb. 6 - 9
National Salute to Veterans Week: Feb. 8 – 14
President’s Day: Jan. 17

**Comments and suggestions about our newsletter? Send them to
 Christopher.menzie@va.gov**

Please Take Our Patient Satisfaction Surveys

We need feedback on your health care experience to continue improving the high-quality care and customer service we provide. We send our patient satisfaction surveys via mail and email on a regular basis and if you receive one, please take a moment to complete it. We are listening and want to improve – if you have a good or bad experience, we want to hear from you. We want you to Choose VA!

About VA San Diego Healthcare System



The VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) provides a wide range of inpatient and outpatient services at the medical center in La Jolla; and at six community clinics located in Chula Vista, Escondido, Imperial Valley, Mission Valley, Oceanside, Sorrento Valley and at the Rio Clinic. We

provide medical, surgical, mental health, geriatric, spinal cord injury and advanced rehabilitation services. VASDHS has 296 authorized hospital beds including skilled nursing beds and operates several regional referral programs including cardiovascular surgery and spinal cord injury care.

We are affiliated with the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine and provide training for 1,399 medical interns, residents and fellows as well as 676 other health profession trainees in areas such as nursing, pharmacy, dental and dietetics. VASDHS has one of the largest research programs in the VA nationally with a budget of \$44.3 million, >211 principal investigators and 676 projects.

Number of Veterans who received care from VASDHS in FY 2019: 86,138
***Number of Veterans in San Diego County:**238,352
***Number of Veterans in Imperial Valley:**6,069
Total Veterans living in SD & Imperial Valley Counties:244,421

**from VetPro, 9/30/2019*

Important Phone Numbers:

VASDHS Main Line: (858) 552-8585
 VASDHS Patient Call Center
 (Appointments/Questions): ... (858) 552-7475
 Health Benefits & Enrollment: (858) 552-7523
 Billing (Copays, etc.): (866) 802-6381
 Community Care Authorization Line: (858) 623-1879
 Billing (Community Care):.... (858) 657-1313
 Billing (TriWest):(855) 722-2838
 Request your Records: (858) 642-3661
 Suicide Prevention: ... (800) 273-8255, press 1

VA Secretary Wilkie’s Priorities:

- Customer Service
- Implementing the MISSION Act
- Electronic Health Record
- Transforming our Business Systems