Local Veteran Competes Nationally with USA Archery Team

Army Veteran Mike Brown credits his VA physicians with getting him where he is now. A few years back, Brown was seen for a suspected shoulder injury at the San Diego VA Medical Center. He soon found that his issue originated from a pinched nerve in his neck as the result of an old IED injury in 2005 that had reinjured itself. With the combined help from staff and therapy, he is now on his way to competing with the TEAM USA - Master’s Archery Team. Go Mike!

May is Mental Health Month

What do the words “mental health” mean to you? For some, these words bring to mind symptoms and conditions — struggles with anxiety, insomnia, anger, isolation, depression.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. Mental health can also mean reconnecting with a son or daughter, realizing you don’t need alcohol and moving on, regaining confidence and going back to school, acing an interview and landing your dream job. Every day, Veterans prove that mental health means building a stronger you.

This May, in observance of Mental Health Month, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will highlight the life-changing outcomes and the possibilities that stem from mental health treatment. Whether you’re a Veteran sharing your story, a family member providing support, or a friend lending a hand, focusing on these positive outcomes can be a powerful way to provide encouragement and shape how Veterans and our entire nation thinks about treatment when they’re facing mental health challenges.

There’s Kionte, a Marine Corps Veteran, who’s now climbing mountains. He overcame the depression that developed after he lost part of his right leg in Afghanistan. There’s Linda, who went back to school, earned her master’s degree, and now works for VA. She overcame PTSD after working as a combat trauma nurse in both the Army and the Air Force.

We encourage you to share these stories this May and visit MakeTheConnection.net/mhmt to see what mental health has really meant to so many other Veterans.
Talking About Marijuana With Your Provider

Veterans should know that federal law classifies marijuana – including all derivative products - as a Schedule One controlled substance. This makes it illegal in the eyes of the federal government. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is required to follow all federal laws including those regarding marijuana. As long as the Food and Drug Administration classifies marijuana as Schedule One, VA health care providers may not recommend it or assist Veterans to obtain it. VA will also not pay for medical marijuana prescriptions from any source.

Veterans will not be denied VA benefits because of marijuana use and are encouraged to discuss marijuana use with their VA providers. VA health care providers will record marijuana use in the Veteran's VA medical record to have the information available in treatment planning. As with all clinical information, this is part of the confidential medical record and protected under patient privacy and confidentiality laws and regulations.

As a reminder, the use or possession of marijuana is prohibited at all VA medical centers, locations, and grounds. When you are on VA grounds, it is federal law that is in force, not the laws of the state.

Adoption Reimbursement

VA has amended its regulation to provide reimbursement of qualifying adoption expenses incurred by veterans with a service connected disability that results in infertility. Covered veterans may request reimbursement for qualifying adoption expenses incurred for adoption finalized after September 29, 2016. The application for reimbursement must be submitted no later than 2 years after the adoption is final or, in the case of adoption of a foreign child, no later than two years from the date a certificate of United States citizenship is issued.

Funds to provide reimbursement for qualifying adoption expenses incurred by a covered veteran in the adoption of a child under 18 years of age are authorized through September 30, 2018. The adoption must be arranged by a qualified adoption agency. Please contact the Women Veteran Program Manager at 858-642-3676 for more information and how to apply.

Cancer Survivors Event

Do you ever think, “Cancer seems so scary! Is there anything I can do to prevent it?” Or, maybe you are a cancer survivor and want to know if there are steps you take towards better overall health. The answer is yes, and strategies will be highlighted at our upcoming Cancer Survivor, Prevention and Education Fair on Wednesday June 20, 2018 10:30am – 12:30pm in the La Jolla VA Medical Center, 1st floor Multipurpose Room.

This event will feature San Diego VHA experts and community partners to share information on:

- Lung cancer screening for early diagnosis
• Nutrition as Prevention
• Recommendations on risk reduction and screening for skin, breast, prostate, colorectal, liver and other cancers
• Stress reduction strategies including humor, mindfulness
• Pain management
• Complementary and Integrative Health
• Smoking cessation
• MOVE! & Healthy habits (Health Promotion, Disease Prevention)
• Nutrition services
• American Cancer Society
• Patient Education
• Social Work
• LIVESTRONG at the YMCA
• Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
• Lung Force
• Kids Konnected (Provide support for kids & teens who have a parent/grandparent with cancer)

**Telehealth Program for Chronic Illnesses**

The VA is committed to advancing the treatment of Veterans using modern technology and exploring alternative types of care. One of these alternatives is home telehealth. Telehealth is a program that provides new ways to improve your physical and/or mental health through special equipment in your home that is easy to use. This is particularly helpful for Veterans with difficulty coming to appointments or need help managing chronic illness.

Patients with Congestive Heart Failure (CHF), for example, can benefit from Telehealth by providing information such as blood pressure and weight daily through a secured network to track overall health and wellbeing. Veterans are expected to complete sessions daily and a nurse Care Coordinator reviews data transmitted Monday through Friday to take appropriate action if something looks off. The Care Coordinator talks to members of your health care team (provider, nurse, pharmacist, therapist, dietitian, etc.) to recommend changes in your treatment plan with your input. Patients are provided a direct phone number to the Care Coordinator to answer any questions or concerns that arise, as well.

There is an eligibility process before enrollment. The most qualifying factors are a telephone, a chronic disease condition that is not well controlled despite routine clinic visits, and a willingness to participate. Veterans must be screened and qualify for the program. If you are interested in learning more, tell your Primary Care Provider and they may be able to refer you. Women can also call the Women’s Home Telehealth Program at (858) 518-5628.

**Food Empowerment Program**
VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) has initiated the Food Empowerment Program to immediately enhance the lives of veterans by meeting a basic human need, and to empower veterans in self-sufficiency long-term by connecting them to food resources in their community. Dieticians and social workers in the Oceanside and Escondido PACT clinics will assess Veterans for food insecurity and can provide one-time emergency food assistance (a bag of assorted groceries) to those who qualify. The Veteran will also be provided with ongoing resources in their community to educate them about sustainable food resources and government support programs. This program is a coordinated effort between VASDHS, the San Diego Food Bank and Us 4 Warriors (U4W), a not-for-profit organization whose goals include improving food security amongst Veterans in need. If a Veteran would like education, resources or assistance purchasing groceries, they can schedule an appointment with their social worker or dietician.

Can’t Make Your Appointment? No Problem – Call Us!

If you have a medical appointment and can’t make it, please call us. We are happy to reschedule for you. In fiscal year 2017, VA San Diego had 426,757 missed appointments (almost 9% of scheduled appointments). Those appointments times could have been given to another Veteran so they could be seen sooner. With your help, we can reduce the number of missed appointments by offering the appointment to another Veteran in need of care. For your convenience, if you scheduled your appointment online, you can cancel it online too.

Appointment Access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appt. wait times: (completed appts as of 3/31/18)</th>
<th>Primary Care: 1.47 days</th>
<th>Specialty Care: 5.44 days</th>
<th>Mental Health: 2.63 days</th>
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Choice referrals:

In fiscal year 2017, VASDHS referred **35,891** Veteran episodes of care to the community for a total cost of **$69,891,170**.

Calendar

**Mental Health Month**

**Cinco de Mayo**: May 5

**National Nurses Week**: May 6 – Apr. 12

**Mother’s Day**: May 13

**National Police Week**: May 12 – 19

**National Women’s Health Week**: May 13 - 19

**Memorial Day**: May 28
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 1,440 medical interns, residents and fellows as well as 751 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 $41.3 million, 210 principal investigators and 698 projects.

Number of Veterans who received care from VASDHS in FY 2017: ......................................................... 83,014
*Number of Veterans in San Diego County: .........................243,369
*Number of Veterans in Imperial Valley: ..............................6,225
Total Veterans living in SD & Imperial Valley Counties: ...249,594

*from VetPop, 9/30/2017

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
Billing (Community Care): ................. (858) 657-1313
Billing (Choice Program): ................. (855) 722-2838
Suicide Prevention: ............................. (800) 273-8255, press 1

VA’s Top 5 Priorities:

1. Greater Choice for Veterans
2. Modernize Our Systems
3. Focus Resources More Efficiently
4. Improve Timeliness of Services
5. Suicide Prevention