Dear Veterans,

It is with very mixed emotions that I announce my retirement at the end of this year.

Over 39 years ago, I began my VA career as a graduate nurse technician. Within just a few short months, I realized caring for Veterans was my calling and committed my professional career to providing and improving health care for Veterans. I have never regretted that decision.

I held a variety of positions with VA through the years, all leading to VA Pittsburgh as director in January 2016. I planned to stay only two or three years, but didn’t realize how quickly I would fall in love with VA Pittsburgh’s incredible Veterans, its caring and creative employees, and the community.

The time has flown and I have been blessed more than I ever could have imagined. As much as I love serving VA Pittsburgh’s Veterans, my heart is pulling me to my home and my family in West Virginia.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you. Most importantly, thank you for your service and for choosing VA Pittsburgh for your health care needs.

Sincerely,

Karin L. McGraw, MSN, FACHE
Medical Center Director

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IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE: WAIT TIME UPDATE

The wait times listed below are the most recent available for our University Drive and H.J. Heinz III sites from VA’s Access and Quality in VA Healthcare tool as of publication.* The online resource at www.accesstocare.va.gov is easy to use and breaks down data at each of our two main sites and five outpatient clinics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIVERSITY DRIVE</th>
<th>H.J. HEINZ III</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>8</strong> DAYS</td>
<td><strong>5</strong> DAYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Care</td>
<td>Primary Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> DAYS</td>
<td><strong>4</strong> DAYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Care</td>
<td>Mental Health Care</td>
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* Data presented is for return appointments for established patients for the 30-day period ending Aug. 27, 2018. Wait time data previously published here and elsewhere since June 2014 was drawn from www.va.gov/health/access-audit.asp, which will continue to update every two weeks. The two sites present data through different, but meaningful, data definitions.
VEText Launches

New interactive text message appointment reminders now make it easier for Veterans to confirm or cancel their VA Pittsburgh appointments – and help reduce their fellow Veterans’ waiting times.

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System launched VEText in April. VEText sends text messages with appointment dates and times to Veterans’ mobile devices. Veterans can cancel or confirm with a simple reply. Canceled appointment times are then immediately available to other Veterans, reducing waiting times.

Enrollment is automatic and the service is free. Veterans can opt out or restart the service at any time.

VEText sends the first appointment reminder seven days before an appointment, followed by a second reminder two days before the appointment. Some clinics may send texts at different time intervals. Each message contains instructions on how to cancel or confirm appointments, or stop the texts, with a simple reply.

The messages contain only simple date and time reminders. They do not show personally identifiable information (PII) or protected health information (PHI).

To receive VEText messages, make sure we have your current mobile number. Update your mobile number at any kiosk, during any appointment check-in or check-out, or at myhealth.va.gov.

The text messages do not replace appointment-reminder letters, postcards and automated phone calls VA already sends to all Veterans, even those who use VEText. VEText works for VA health care appointments only. It does not at this time send text-message reminders for appointments scheduled through Veterans Choice or Community Care programs.

BY THE NUMBERS

VEText cancelations free up VA medical appointments for waiting Veterans.

10% AVERAGE REDUCTION IN NO-SHOWS at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

NATIONALLY

100,000+ FEWER NO-SHOWS

319,504 APPOINTMENTS CANCELED*

*As of July 9.
Connect to Your Care

**Audiology**: Hearing, tinnitus and balance disorders. 412-360-6400

**Behavioral Health**: Consultation, evaluation and treatment. 412-360-6600

**Caregiver Services**: Help at home and someone to listen. 412-822-2364 or 1-855-260-3274

**Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders**: Outpatient and residential treatment for the misuse of alcohol, prescribed medications or other substances. Residential: 412-360-6611 Outpatient: 412-360-6092

**Chaplain Services**: 412-822-1551

**Community Based Care**: Services to help chronically ill or disabled Veterans of any age remain in their homes. 412-822-2910

**Connected Care**: Telehealth, VA Mobile and more. 412-360-3235

**Critical Care**: Inpatient care for life-threatening injuries and illnesses. 412-360-6215 (CCU, ICU, etc.)

**Dental**: 412-822-2130

**Emergency Department**: 24-hour emergency health care, including mental health services. 412-360-6322

**Eye Clinic**: 412-360-6700

**Environmental Registries**: 412-822-1707

**Homeless Veterans**: Transitional and permanent housing, case management, dental and medical care. 412-822-1272

**Help for Homeless Veterans hotline**: 877-4AID-VET (424-3838)

**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Veterans**: Culturally and clinically competent care for LGBT Veterans. 412-360-1210

**Military Sexual Trauma**: Help for any Veteran who experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment during military service. 412-360-1040

**My HealtheVet**: Online access to health records, electronic messaging and prescription refills. www.myhealth.va.gov 412-360-6838

**Pathology and Laboratory**: 412-360-1572

**Patient Advocate**: 412-360-3614 or 412-822-1562

**Pharmacy**: Refill prescriptions by phone, mail or the internet. 412-822-3140

**Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation**: Inpatient and outpatient physical, occupational, and kinesiotherapy, low vision and blind rehab services. 412-822-2111

**Primary Care**: Annual checkups, nutrition counseling and more. 412-822-3000

**Podiatry**: 412-822-3000, press 5

**Prosthetics**: 412-822-3728

**Radiology**: X-ray, ultrasound, CT, and MRI. 412-360-6216

**Rainbow Clinic**: 412-360-6242

**Research**: Improving lives through health care discovery and innovation. 412-360-2386

**Speech Pathology**: Treatments for speech, language, voice, cognitive communication, swallowing impairments and training for stroke patients. 412-360-6400

**Spinal Cord Injury**: 412-822-3000

**Surgical Services**: Same-day surgery, neurosurgery and cardiothoracic, hand, ophthalmology, orthopedic, otolaryngology, plastic and vascular surgery. 412-360-6700

**Transition and Care Management Program**: Health care tailored to post-911 Veterans. 412-822-2362

**Travel Office**: 412-360-3620 or 412-360-6783

**Vet Centers**: Counseling and referral for combat Veterans, their families, and any Veteran who was sexually traumatized while serving. Pittsburgh: 412-920-1765 Wheeling: 304-232-0587 White Oak: 412-678-7704

**Veterans Crisis Line**: Confidential help for Veterans in crisis and their families and friends. www.veteranscrisisline.net 1-800-273-8255 (press 1) Text to 838255

**Voluntary and Recreation Services**: 412-822-3098

**Women’s Health Services**: 412-360-6289

Not all Veterans are eligible for every service listed.

For a more comprehensive list of services, visit [www.pittsburgh.va.gov/services](http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov/services)
Am I eligible for VA dental care?

VA wants all Veterans to have access to good oral health, but only certain Veterans are eligible, by law. Veterans who meet any of the criteria in the chart below may be eligible. VA Pittsburgh provides dental care to eligible Veterans at its H.J. Heinz III campus.

Eligibility for outpatient dental care is not the same as for most other VA medical benefits and is categorized into classes. If you are eligible for VA dental care under Class I, IIA, IIC or IV, you are eligible for any necessary dental care to maintain or restore oral health and chewing function, including repeat care. Other classes have time and/or service limitations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELIGIBILITY</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service-connected compensable dental disability or condition.</td>
<td>Class I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former prisoner of war.</td>
<td>Class IIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-connected disabilities rated 100 percent disabling, or are unemployable and paid at the 100 percent rate due to service-connected conditions.</td>
<td>Class IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply for dental care within 180 days of discharge or release (under conditions other than dishonorable) from a period of active duty of 90 days or more during the Persian Gulf War era.</td>
<td>Class II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-connected noncompensable dental condition or disability resulting from combat wounds or service trauma.</td>
<td>Class IIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a dental condition clinically determined by VA to be associated with and aggravating a service-connected medical condition.</td>
<td>Class III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engaged in a 38 USC Chapter 31 vocational rehabilitation program.</td>
<td>Class V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are receiving VA care or are scheduled for inpatient care and require dental care for a condition complicating a medical condition currently under treatment.</td>
<td>Class VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled Veteran who may be homeless and receiving care under VHA Directive 2007-039.</td>
<td>Class IIB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If not eligible, enrolled Veterans and Civilian Health and Medical Program of the VA (CHAMPVA) beneficiaries can purchase discounted dental insurance through the VA Dental Insurance Program (VADIP). Plans and costs vary through two available providers: Delta Dental and MetLife. Call Delta Dental at 1-855-370-3303 or go online at feds.deltadentalins.com/vadip. Contact MetLife at 1-888-310-1681 or visit metlife.com/vadip.
**PROGRAM Spotlight**

**PROVIDER**
Guides the Veteran's overall care, helps set health goals and addresses other concerns.

**REGISTERED NURSE**
Provides education and coordinates specialty care.

**LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE**
Takes vital signs at visits, assists with tests and immunizations, medication renewals and more.

**ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL**
Schedules appointments and directs the Veteran’s questions to the right team member.
PACTs Empower Veterans

At VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, our Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs) empower Veterans to take the lead in their health care.

PACTs allow VA to personalize, coordinate and manage care in a way that best meets each Veteran’s individualized needs.

“PACTs benefit the Veteran by providing them with centered, focused care,” said Shannon Sullivan, certified registered nurse practitioner at the Beaver County Outpatient Clinic.

The PACT care model is transforming the way Veterans receive VA health care. It uses evidence-based approaches to promote health and prevent disease. It is patient-driven to tailor care to each Veteran’s individual needs by focusing on wellness and disease prevention.

Each individualized PACT can include a provider, nurse, administrative professional, pharmacist, dietitian, social worker and other clinicians. The Veteran is at the center of his or her PACT. Working with the Veteran, the PACT coordinates access to care, promotes lifelong health and wellness, and addresses all of the Veteran’s health concerns.

The recently relocated Beaver County Outpatient Clinic is designed to optimize VA’s PACT care model. Private exam rooms surround a separate clinical area where staff collaborate, and the overall layout enhances privacy while simplifying clinic navigation.

To learn more about health care services available to eligible Veterans through the Beaver County Outpatient Clinic or other VA Pittsburgh health care facilities, visit www.pittsburgh.va.gov or call 866-482-7488.

Army Veteran Mark Sible of Ambridge said his care team “goes above and beyond” to meet his health care needs.

“That team couldn’t be any better. They saved my life.”

Shannon Sullivan, CRNP

PACT benefits the Veteran by providing them with centered, focused care.”

Army Veteran Mark Sible (center) with his PACT caregivers Danielle Ricci, medical assistant (left), Becky Bailey, LPN, Shannon Sullivan, CRNP, and Celeste Chimile, RN.
FOCUS ON
HEALTHY LIVING

Get Active for Good Health

Two out of every three deaths in the U.S. are from chronic conditions like diabetes, cancer and heart disease, according to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Want to lessen your chances of developing a chronic disease? Get active!

Research shows just 2 ½ hours of moderate-intensity physical activity promotes health and reduces the risk of chronic disease. By adopting an active lifestyle, you just may look and feel better, too.

According to HHS’ 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines (most recent available), some activity is better than none. For general health, aim for 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity. To manage weight, work your way up to 300 minutes of moderate activity weekly, or 150 minutes of vigorous activity.

Moderate vs. Vigorous
What is the difference between moderate and vigorous activity? You are at a moderate level if you can talk when active, but not sing. You are at a vigorous level when you can say only a few words before pausing to breathe.

How do I start?
How you choose to be active is your choice. HHS recommends choosing any activity that works for you. Plan for 10 minutes of activity at a time, with sessions spread out over at least five days of the week. Track your activity to make sure you are meeting your goals.

How do I build up my physical activity?
• Set goals and start slowly.
• Do more when you feel ready.
• Add vigorous activity when able.
• Plan moderate and vigorous activities each week.

Do I need to see my provider first?
Always check with your primary care provider before starting any new diet or exercise program.

Want to learn more? VA Pittsburgh’s MOVE! program helps Veterans meet diet and fitness goals. Contact Melanie Erskine at 412-822-3114.

Soy and Spinach Artichoke Dip

Ingredients:
1 lb tofu, crumbled
1 lb lowfat cream cheese, cubed
1 cup lowfat mayonnaise
1/2 tsp ground pepper
1 lb frozen chopped spinach, thawed, drained
1 lb marinated artichoke hearts, drained, coarsely chopped
1/2 cup green onions, chopped

Directions:
Beat tofu until smooth; mix in cream cheese, mayonnaise and pepper in mixer bowl. Fold in spinach, artichokes and green onions. Divide mixture equally into 12 (4 oz) au gratin dishes. Sprinkle Parmesan cheese on top, if desired.

Bake at 350°F for 15 to 20 minutes or until bubbly and browned on top.

Tips: Serve with whole grain crackers or whole grain pita bread.

Nutrition per serving (not including crackers): 62 calories, 6.6 gm protein, 5.7 gm carbohydrates, 1.4 gm fat, 3.9 mg cholesterol, 254 mg sodium, 1.5 gm dietary fiber

Combat or war-zone service leaves a lasting mark, say many Veterans, but the real issue often lies in returning home. Whether your combat experience was last month or decades ago, transitioning to civilian life is challenging. That’s where Vet Centers make a positive difference in Veterans’ lives.

Vet Centers are welcoming places in the communities where Veterans live. Through individual and group counseling, Vet Centers offer life-improving skills for combat and war-zone Veterans or survivors of Military Sexual Trauma (MST). They are safe, comfortable, confidential and family friendly places for like-minded Veterans to share similar experiences.

At Vet Centers, Veterans speak with trained counselors who are also Veterans, often with combat experience. Services are free of charge to eligible Veterans and their families for life; after-hours care is available; and spouses and significant others are welcome. Available services include groups for men, women, spouses, OEF/OIF/OND Veterans and Vietnam Veterans. Centers host special events and partner with community groups to meet Veterans’ needs. Counselors will answer questions about other VA benefits and advocate for Veterans. Vet Center counselors are also trained specifically to work with Veterans who have experienced MST. The centers offer a safe, comfortable environment that is often a welcome change from clinical and hospital settings.

Vet Centers are completely confidential: No one at the Department of Veterans Affairs can access Vet Center treatment records without the Veteran’s written consent, and enrollment in VA health care is not required.

For more information, visit www.pittsburgh.va.gov/services/vet-centers.asp

VET CENTER LOCATIONS

- **Pittsburgh Vet Center**
  2500 Baldwick Rd., Suite 15
  Pittsburgh, PA 15205
  412-920-1765

- **White Oak Vet Center**
  2001 Lincoln Way, Suite 21
  McKeesport, PA 15131
  412-678-7704

- **Wheeling Vet Center**
  1058 E. Bethlehem Blvd.
  Wheeling, WV 26003
  304-232-0587
FOCUS ON
WOMEN’S HEALTH

Treating Chronic Pain in Women

Women Veterans have a greater risk of chronic pain from joint disorders and long-term disability than male Veterans.

Women tend to sustain more injuries than men during basic training or real-world military operations. Ill-fitting gear, bulky rucksacks or just plain physical exertion all contribute to the potential for injuries. Mental health conditions and trauma also play a part in long-term disabilities.

Low back pain is the third-most diagnosed condition in women Veterans at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. For that reason, many of VA Pittsburgh’s Designated Women’s Health Providers (DWHPs) take nationally developed training in musculoskeletal (MSK) pain in women. DWHPs who complete the training – developed through a partnership between the Veterans Health Administration and VA Salt Lake City Health Care System – are better able to diagnose and treat MSK in women Veterans.

The training boosts providers’ confidence in performing shoulder, back, hip and knee exams to diagnose MSK. The course also teaches providers when to refer women to advanced radiology and specialty care.

“As a result, VA Pittsburgh’s providers are armed with better knowledge and skills to evaluate, diagnose and manage MSK conditions in primary care,” said Val Posa, women’s health program manager. “This saves time and money for women seeking pain relief.”

VA Pittsburgh providers who take the training also become teachers, passing on their new skills to other DWHPs.

To learn more about women’s health care at VA Pittsburgh, contact Val Posa, women Veterans program manager, at 412-360-6289.

Secure Medication Disposal

Veterans can now securely dispose of unwanted prescription medications at VA Pittsburgh’s two main medical facilities. Simply drop unneeded or expired medications in any MedSafe medication takeback box at the University Drive or H.J. Heinz III campus.

Secure medication disposal lessens the chance of misuse, overdoses and accidental poisonings. Most Americans who abuse prescription drugs obtain them from home medicine cabinets, according to the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

The blue MedSafe medication takeback boxes are located near the VA Police offices in the Community Living Center at our Heinz campus and in building 1 at University Drive.

Questions? Call VA Police at 412-360-1457.
Q. How do I access my VA medical records?
A. Visit the Release of Information Office (ROI) at our University Drive or H.J. Heinz III campus. Records requests take approximately 10-14 days to process. Patients with a premium My HealtheVet account can view most medical records online. Visit www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/download-your-own-va-medical-records for details.

Q. Why does VA need my personal health insurance information?
A. VA is required to bill private health insurance providers for medical care, supplies and prescriptions provided for treatment of Veterans’ non-service connected care. VA applies insurance payments “dollar for dollar” to your copay to reduce any out-of-pocket costs. Any remaining funds stay within VA to purchase health care supplies and equipment to benefit all Veterans who use VA health care.

Please note: Generally, VA cannot bill Medicare, but can bill Medicare supplemental health insurance for covered services. Visit Patient Registration during your next appointment to update your private insurance information.

Q. I received a letter about the RAMP program. What is this?
A. The Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) is the Veterans Benefits Administration’s (VBA) new appeals process. RAMP helps eligible Veterans resolve their appeals as soon as possible. Veterans can choose from among three appeal lanes, based on their individual circumstances.

Higher level review lane: For Veterans who have no additional evidence to submit, but believe there was an error in their initial claims decision.

Supplemental claim lane: Allows Veterans to submit additional evidence for their existing VBA claim.

Board or Notice of Disagreement (NOD) lane: For use following a RAMP denial. It sends the Veteran’s appeal straight to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals for review. This lane opens in October 2018.

If you think RAMP is right for you, talk with your Veterans Service Officer (VSO) or visit www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals-ramp.asp for more information.
DIRECT SCHEDULING
Veterans enrolled at VA Pittsburgh can now schedule routine appointments for vision, hearing, foot, wheelchair, amputee, nutrition and MOVE weight management/healthy living services without first seeing their primary care physician. For details, visit www.pittsburgh.va.gov/services/direct-scheduling.asp

Don’t Miss a Thing!

Direct Mammogram Scheduling
Veterans can now schedule routine screening mammograms without a Primary Care consult.
Call 412-360-3306 to make an appointment. Walk-in appointments are also available Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Whole Health Classes
Take charge of your health and well-being with our Introduction to Whole Health class. Families are welcome!
Second Monday of every month
10 a.m. to noon
H.J. Heinz III campus
Building 50
Room 1A109
Details: 412-822-3165

Share VA Medical Images
Need to share an X-ray, MRI, mammogram or CT scan with a non-VA provider?
View, download and print most images to share with providers inside and out of the VA health care system. All you need is a Premium My HealtheVet account.
To learn more, call 412-360-6838 or visit www.myhealth.va.gov

2018 Veterans Town Hall on Dec. 12 at 1:30 p.m. at our H.J. Heinz III campus
For more details, visit www.pittsburgh.va.gov/calendar.asp