

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

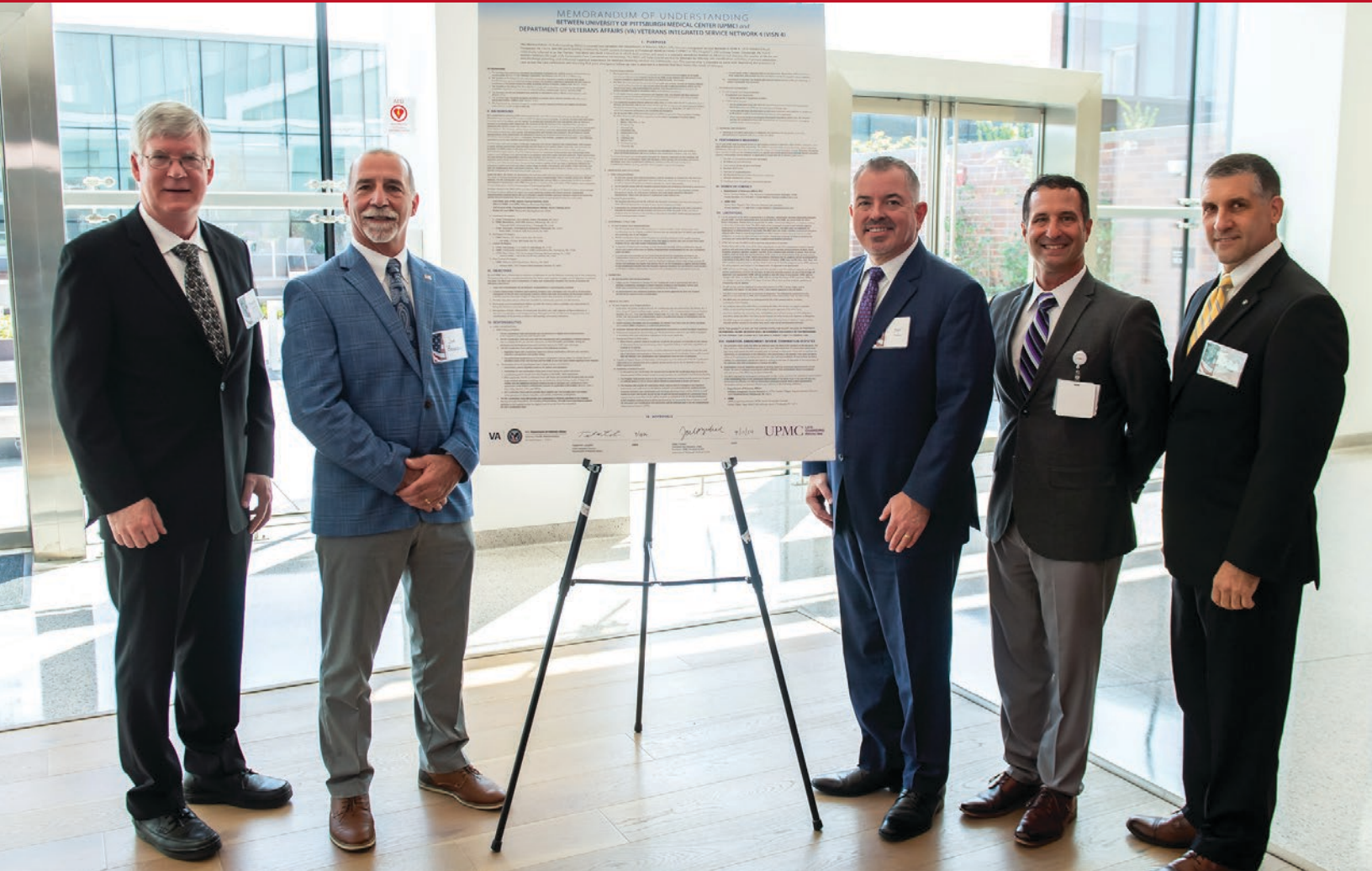
Veterans Health Administration
VA Healthcare—VISN 4

VISION

for Excellence

Newsletter for Veterans and Stakeholders in VISN 4

Issue 36



Statewide Rollout of Community Nurse Liaison Program

On Friday, September 13, 2024, UPMC and VA Healthcare—VISN 4 announced a Pennsylvania statewide rollout of the VA—UPMC Community Nurse Liaison Program, extending services to Veterans by offering care coordination, better hospital admission and discharge planning, and improved inpatient experiences. Community nurse liaisons help improve care provision and ensure that post-emergency follow-up care is directed in a way that best meets Veterans' needs.

(Full story on page 4)

Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of VISN 4:

VISN 4 staff continued to find new ways to reach out and serve Veterans with military environmental exposure over the past few months. As of October 18, a total of 262,063 Veterans in VISN 4 have received a toxic exposure screening since the inception of the PACT Act on August 22, 2022. In addition, Veterans who needed follow-up screenings were cared for in a timely manner.

More than 500 outreach events were attended by VISN 4 Outreach teams during the fiscal year, and those outreach efforts continue.

On September 13, UPMC and VISN 4 announced a Pennsylvania statewide rollout of the VA–UPMC Community Nurse Liaison Program, extending services to Veterans by offering care coordination, better hospital admission and discharge planning, and improved inpatient experiences. VA community nurse liaisons embedded in UPMC hospitals across the state help improve care provision and ensure that post-emergency follow-up care is directed in a way that best meets Veterans' needs. This statewide rollout is an exciting expansion that will benefit countless Veterans and help them more easily navigate the health care system ensuring they get the right care and utilize their VA benefits fully.

As you will read in this issue, VISN 4 is committed to assisting Veterans experiencing homelessness. No Veteran should be homeless in the country they fought to defend, and our Network has taken aggressive action to combat Veteran homelessness. I am very proud to say our Network housed 1,901 Veterans experiencing homelessness over the past year, surpassing our fiscal year 2024 goal one month early by 16.6%.

On behalf of our leadership and staff, I thank all Veterans and their families for entrusting us to provide your health care. It is our honor and a privilege to serve you.

Please stay safe and make sure you get your annual flu vaccine and COVID booster shot when recommended.

Sincerely,

Timothy W. Liezert
Network Director



VA Healthcare-VISN 4 Leadership Team

Timothy W. Liezert
Network Director

Charles R. Thilges
Deputy Network Director

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Chief Medical Officer

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COVER PHOTO (L-R): Tim Liezert, network director, VA Healthcare-VISN 4; Joe Benacci, director, Erie County Veterans Services; Joel Yuhas, president, UPMC Health Services Division, and executive vice president, UPMC; Marc Migala, director, Veteran Care Services, UPMC; and Erik Orient, director, Military Affairs and Student Initiatives, UPMC Social Impact.

VA has housed more than 43,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness this fiscal year

Between October 2023 and August 2024, VA housed 43,116 Veterans experiencing homelessness, surpassing its fiscal year 2024 goal to house 41,000 Veterans one month before the end of the fiscal year. VA has also ensured that 96.3% of the Veterans housed so far this fiscal year have not returned to homelessness, and engaged 38,476 unsheltered Veterans to ensure they have access to the housing and other wraparound services they need.


Locally in VISN 4, we housed 1,901 Veterans experiencing homelessness, surpassing our fiscal year 2024 goal one month early by 16.6% to house 1,631 Veterans. In addition, VISN 4 ensured that 96.7% of those Veterans housed this fiscal year have not returned to homelessness. VISN 4 staff also engaged 1,401 unsheltered Veterans to ensure they have access to the housing and other wraparound services they need.

Preventing and eliminating Veteran homelessness is a top priority for VA. The number of Veterans experiencing homelessness in the U.S. has fallen by over 4% since early 2020 and by more than 52% since 2010.

VA's efforts to combat Veteran homelessness are grounded in reaching out to homeless Veterans, understanding their unique needs, and addressing them. These efforts are built on the evidence-based "Housing First" approach, which prioritizes getting a Veteran into housing, then providing or connecting them with the wraparound services and supports they need to stay housed, including health care, job training, legal and education assistance, and more.

Every day, VA staff and VA's community partners nationwide help Veterans find permanent housing, such as apartments or houses to rent or own, often with subsidies to help make the housing affordable. In some cases, VA staff and partners help Veterans end their homelessness by reuniting them with family and friends.

Visit the [VA.gov/homeless](https://www.va.gov/homeless) to learn about housing initiatives and other programs supporting Veterans experiencing homelessness.

A photograph of a man with a shaved head, wearing a green t-shirt and blue jeans, sitting on a brown tufted bench in a well-lit living room. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The room features a wooden door, a window with a view of trees, and a small table with a lamp in the background.

If you are a Veteran who is experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-4AID-VET (877-424-3838) or visit [VA.gov/homeless](https://www.va.gov/homeless)



Statewide Rollout of Community Nurse Liaison Program

"This statewide rollout is an exciting expansion that will benefit countless Veterans and help them more easily navigate the health care system to ensure they get the right care and utilize their VA benefits fully."

Timothy W. Liezert, network director, VA Healthcare-VISN 4

On September 13, 2024, VISN 4 signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with UPMC implementing a Community Nurse Liaison program at eight UPMC hospitals. The program enhances and expands VISN 4's collaboration with UPMC, providing a seamless transition of care for Veterans after an inpatient stay by coordinating discharges, identifying Veterans who are not in the VA system, and enrolling new Veterans into VA health care.

The Community Nurse Liaison Program model consists of embedding VA registered nurses into eight UPMC hospitals – UPMC Presbyterian, UPMC Montefiore, and

UPMC Passavant in Pittsburgh, UPMC Hamot in Erie, UPMC Harrisburg, UPMC Community Osteopathic in Harrisburg, UPMC West Shore in Mechanicsburg, and UPMC Altoona – to streamline the care of Veterans from admission to discharge.

The new MOU builds upon the already successful Community Nurse Liaison Program between UPMC and VISN 4 that was initiated in August 2022 with UPMC Harrisburg, UPMC West Shore, and UPMC Community Osteopathic – a program that was one of the first of its kind.

Over the past two years, positive outcomes of the program include:

- the ability to identify Veterans who present to a non-VA hospital on the same day/next business day
- increased number of inpatient transfers to VA inpatient units
- repatriation into VA post-discharge
- decreased length of stay
- improved trust in VA (both Veterans and community providers)
- improved collaboration with patient aligned care teams, social work, and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing
- coordination and integrated case management
- an increase in VA enrollment

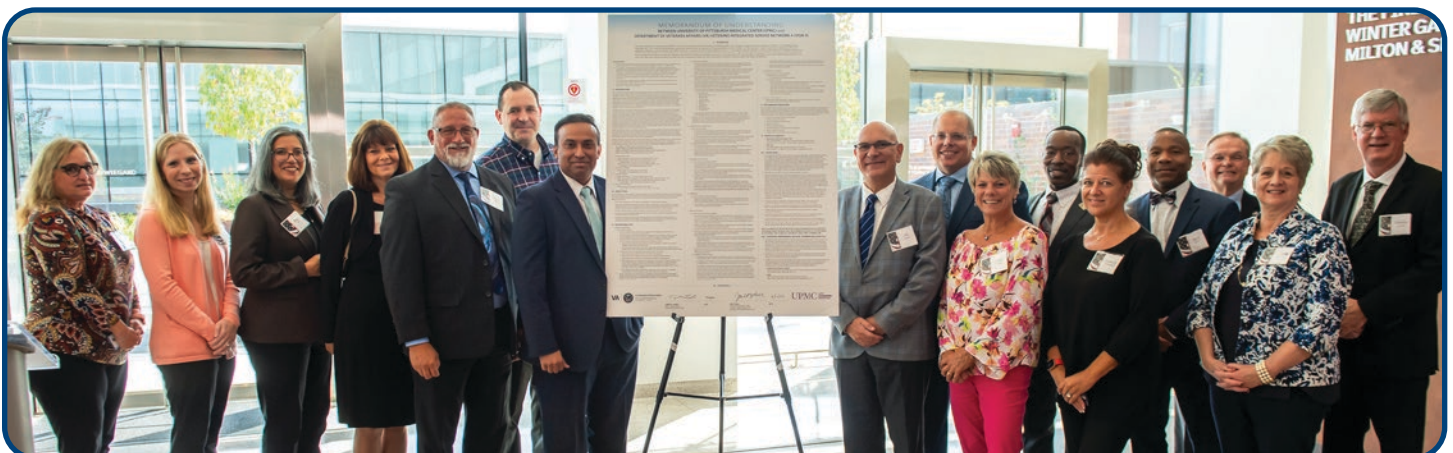
Another part of the community nurse liaison's role is coordinating continued care, including physical therapy, prescriptions, and follow-up appointments by working hand in hand with the community case managers. Through the program, the UPMC hospitals will work closely with their local VA medical centers—VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, Abie Abraham VA Health Care Clinic in Buter, Pa., Erie VA Medical Center, Lebanon VA Medical Center, and James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center in Altoona, Pa.



" This program is a promise that Veterans will experience a new level of concierge-style care which is a standard our Veterans justly deserve. We hope others will take notice and join the VA to expand this program even further."



Joel Yuhas
president, UPMC Health Services Division
executive vice president, UPMC



Connect with us through VA Health Chat

You can use the VA Health Chat app to easily connect with VA staff to ask questions about your health.

If you have a non-urgent health care question, you can use VA Health Chat to quickly connect with a VISN 4 Clinical Contact Center nurse. Our nursing staff is available to chat from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET Monday through Friday except holidays.

You can schedule your next VA appointment quickly and easily using the VA Health Chat app! Our schedulers in the VISN 4 Clinical Contact Center are available to help you from 3 p.m. to midnight on evenings, weekends and holidays.

You can also contact our pharmacy staff with help on tracking your prescriptions, requesting refills or renewals, and answering medication questions. Our pharmacy staff is available to chat from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET Monday through Friday except holidays.

For more information on VA Health Chat, talk to your VA care team or visit mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-chat.



Receive medical advice for a non-urgent injury or illness



Schedule a VA appointment



Refill a VA prescription

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VA Mobile



Now available!

The VA Health Chat app enables you to connect with VA staff to ask questions about your non-life-threatening health concerns.

mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-chat





I CARE represents the core values that define the basic elements of how we go about our work—“who we are”—and form the underlying principles we use every day in our service to Veterans.

VISN 4 established a new, quarterly I CARE award to recognize employees who not only demonstrate our I CARE values, but who go the extra mile to live by our I CARE ideals. There are many wonderful examples of employees demonstrating these values in their day-to-day work.

Integrity • Commitment • Advocacy • Respect • Excellence

FY24 1st Quarter Awardee

Brooklyn Anderson
Veterans Transportation Service
Coatesville VA Medical Center

Veterans Transportation Service Motor Vehicle Operator Brooklyn Anderson went to transport a Veteran to dialysis. The Veteran was living in a hotel. Brooklyn is a PA National Guard with the 2nd 104 Calvary Scout. She was deployed with the Composite Truck company into Kuwait and Iraq. Brooklyn had a great relationship with the Veteran who was also a PA National Guard soldier and motor transportation operator. They often shared stories about Fort Indiantown Gap, a military base in Lebanon, Pa., and compared their military experience with the differences between meals, gear, vehicles, and weapons throughout the years.

She transported him multiple times a week to his dialysis treatments. On one particular day, Brooklyn noticed the Veteran was delayed with his greeting and it was not as exciting as usual. This was not their normal interaction. On this day, the Veteran was not up and smiling and he is usually outside and waiting for Brooklyn's arrival.

As she was standing next to the Veteran, she asked how he was doing and if he was ok. He was complaining that his stomach hurt and thought he had food poisoning. He requested that Brooklyn help him to stand, but he was unable to stand on his own. Another hotel resident who was a medic tried to help without success, and also shared that she had given him some food earlier. The Veteran said his knee pain was too severe to stand, and immediately after this conversation, he fell back onto the chair and lost consciousness and was unresponsive.

Brooklyn immediately went into action to help the Veteran and instructed the front desk personnel to call 911. She moved the Veteran to the floor safely and immediately began CPR. Brooklyn administered the lifesaving



procedures while anxiously waiting for the paramedics. She continued CPR until the paramedics arrived and took over. While the paramedics were working on the Veteran, Brooklyn called the VTS office to inform her supervisor of what took place. She asked to confirm any medical changes in the Veteran's chart for the paramedics since he was unresponsive.

Brooklyn's quick response and attention to detail allowed her to stabilize the Veteran until he was transported to the local emergency room for continued care. Brooklyn's actions saved the Veteran's life and are a true illustration of ICARE values and the HRO principle, 'It's About the Veteran'.

Prepare for VA's secure sign-in changes

We're moving to a simpler and more modern online sign-in experience for Veterans and other beneficiaries who access VA online services.

In 2025, VA will transition to 2 sign-in account options: Login.gov and ID.me. Veterans will be able to use either a Login.gov or ID.me account to sign in to VA.gov, VA mobile applications, or other VA online services.

Sign in



This transition helps us meet Veterans' requests for a simpler sign-in experience while continuing to improve our security standards, comply with federal policies, and ensure Veteran data and identity protection.

Ready to create your account or want to learn more?

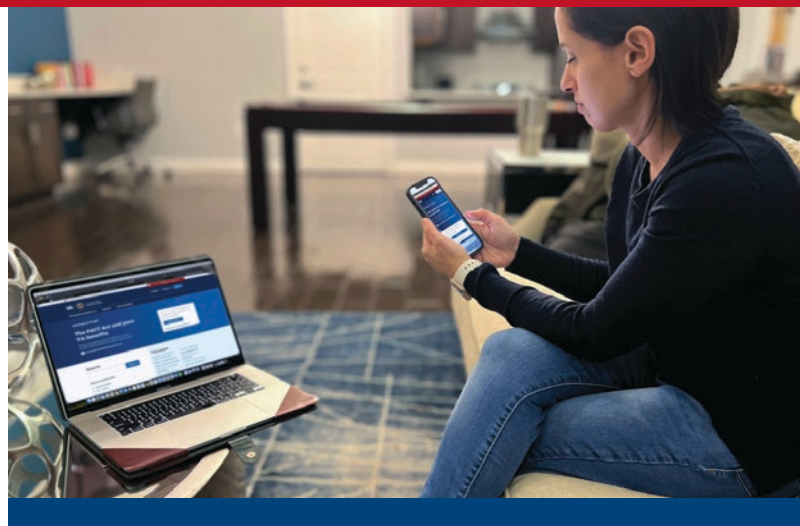
Visit www.va.gov/sign-in-changes/ to get started today!



MHV Sign-In Transition Update

As of September 19, 2024, the "Registration" and "Sign in" buttons were replaced with a single "Sign in or create an account" button on My HealtheVet's home page.

- Veterans will no longer be able to create a My HealtheVet (MHV) account with a MHV user ID and password. Instead, new My HealtheVet accounts will be created using a modern (identity verified + multifactor authentication ID.me or Login.gov) account.
- New My HealtheVet accounts will not have a MHV User ID and password.



- Veterans with an existing My HealtheVet user ID and password will be able to continue using this sign in method through January 31, 2025.
- Veterans who already have a MHV user ID and password obtained before September 19, 2024, will be able to be in-person identity verified and their accounts upgraded to Premium through January 31, 2025.
- The new "Sign in or create an account" page will allow users to sign in using the same method they currently sign in to My HealtheVet.

My VA Images

The VA Connected Care program offers Veterans many tools to support their care from home. My VA Images (MVAI) allows providers to request photos and videos directly from their patients to assist in their care.

The app will guide patients through taking the required photos and/or videos and remind them when the images are due. It is a secure web-application that will protect patient information from upload through submission.

Patients can use a smart mobile device or personal computer, avoid travel, and wait times while receiving expert health care for specified needs from anywhere, anytime.

Information and training materials for the VA apps can be found on the VA App Store at mobile.va.gov/appstore.



Pharmacogenomics: When one size does not fit all

Genes are parts of our DNA that provide instructions on how your body develops and functions. Everyone has small differences in their genes, and because of this, people may respond differently to medicines.

Pharmacogenomics (PGx) uses information from YOUR genes to help find the right dose and medicine for you. VA now offers a no-cost blood test to patients to understand how your body responds to medicines.

How can the results be beneficial for you?

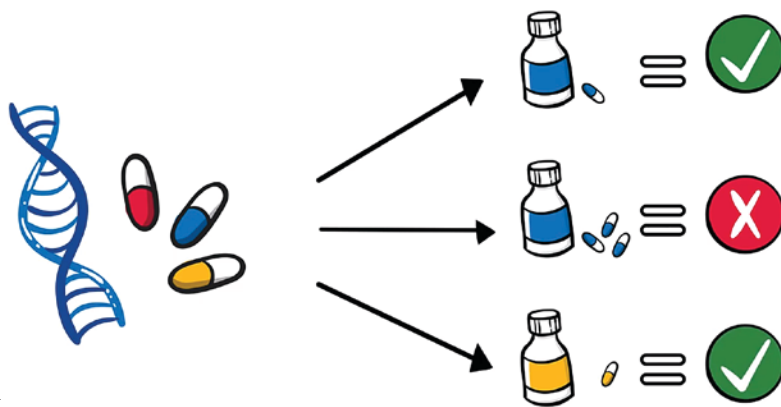
- Help your provider find a medication that is safe for you
- Decrease side effects
- Reduce the trial-and-error process of medication commonly seen with antidepressants and pain regimens

Medications that can be impacted include:

- Antidepressants
- Pain medications
- Stomach medications
- Cholesterol medications
- And many more

What do I need to know before testing?

- PGx testing is free for Veterans through December 2025
- Pharmacogenomics is just one factor that may impact how you respond to a medicine
- Other factors include your age, sex, race, ethnicity, and other medicines you may be taking
- Federal law protects patients from discrimination by insurance companies or employers based on testing results.
- If you have had a liver or certain bone marrow transplants, you are not a candidate for testing



Pharmacogenomic testing is currently available at all VA medical centers and outpatient clinics in VISN 4. If you are interested in testing, please speak to your VA health care provider, and never stop taking your medications without first speaking to your provider.

Learn more about Pharmacogenomics

Join us on the first Tuesday of every month at 10 a.m. ET to learn more about Pharmacogenomics testing from our VISN 4 PGx team.

Join via Microsoft Teams

- Date/Time: first Tuesday of every month at 10 a.m. ET
- Join Microsoft Teams at <https://bit.ly/3WfGcwX>
- Meeting ID: 265 373 202 374
- Passcode: nG9Vbm

Join by phone

- Call 1-872-701-0185
- Conference ID: 398 270 202#

Connect with us through VA Health Chat

Do you have questions or need more information about pharmacogenomic testing? A member of our VISN 4 PGx team can now assist you in the VA Health Chat app.

The PGx feature in the VA Health Chat App is available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. ET. This feature will be available for a limited time to Veterans receiving care at all VA medical centers in VISN 4.

Download the VA Health Chat app and learn more at mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-chat.

Flu Vaccines

Eligible Veterans can get a free flu shot from a nearby VA clinic or within your community from one of nearly 65,000 in-network pharmacies or urgent care locations. Flu vaccines are available September through April.

To find a VA medical facility, in-network urgent care or retail pharmacy near you, use our VA locator at www.va.gov/find-locations.

Learn more at www.prevention.va.gov/flu.

New VISN 4 Website



The VISN 4 internet website was recently updated to a new streamlined and mobile-friendly format. The new site is available at department.va.gov/integrated-service-networks/visn-04.

Any current links to the old site or pages from www.visn4.va.gov will redirect to the new site.



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We'd Like to Hear from You

Vision for Excellence is published for the employees, volunteers, patients and friends of VA Healthcare-VISN 4. For more information about this publication, contact David Cowgill at david.cowgill@va.gov.