

Access Awareness Month



Quality of care for Veterans includes raising awareness around important health topics. By highlighting some of the national health awareness campaigns each month, Veterans can get ideas, information, and resources on a variety of health matters.

January is Access Awareness Month, and we want to make Veterans aware on what the VA is doing to improve access to VA health care.

Veterans Transportation Service

The Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) provides safe and reliable transportation to Veterans who need assistance traveling to and from VA health care facilities and authorized non-VA health care appointments. VTS also partners with service providers in local communities to serve Veterans' transportation needs.

Kiosks

Kiosks are a self-service, touch screen device that allows enrolled Veterans to have convenient control and access to their health information, improve Veterans' experience with VA and offer Veterans self-serving activities such as:

- Check-in for scheduled appointments
- View future appointments
- Manage, review and update personal and insurance information
- Apply for reimbursement of travel to appointments
- More discreetly provide information they may view as sensitive, such as age or race/ethnicity

- Apply for beneficiary travel mileage reimbursement
- Request medical records
- Manage their account balance and more

Kiosks are conveniently located in VA medical centers and community based outpatient clinics across the U.S. Additional Kiosks are being added at VA facilities nationwide. Most facilities have staff or volunteers dedicated to assisting you in using the Kiosks.

Telehealth

VA Telehealth Services uses health informatics, disease management and telehealth technologies to target care and case management to improve access to care, improving the health of veterans. Telehealth changes the location where health care services are routinely provided.

The value VA derives from telehealth is not only in implementing telehealth technologies, but how VA uses health informatics, disease management and telehealth technologies to target care and case management thereby facilitating access to care and improving the health of veterans.

New technologies such as telehealth help improve health care services. For technology to work it must work for the people it is meant to help - patients and the professionals providing care.

Telehealth in VA helps ensure veteran patients get the right care in the right place at the right time. It aims to make the home into the preferred place of care, whenever possible with the help of technology.

Wait times for an appointment

Some Veterans are still waiting longer than they prefer for their appointments, and the VA is working hard to try to get them the care they have earned when they need it.

We realize appointment wait-time data, and how it gets calculated in a system that schedules over 80 million encounters a year, can be complex and hard to understand. That's why we want to take time to explain our methods. We are working in good faith to be as transparent and open as possible with our data, and the way it's calculated.

VA began publicly posting patient access data online in June 2014. The data can be found [here](#). In October, as directed by Congress, VA made clear it was establishing new wait-time standards that more accurately reflect whether or not a veteran has been waiting too long for an appointment. VA has since done that, and has been fully transparent about it all along. We began reporting average appointment wait times in two categories: completed and pending. Both of these measures are determined based on the Veteran's preferred date. The preferred date method is based on a clinician's specified date for the patient to be seen, or in the absence of a clinical recommendation, the date a patient wants to be seen.

We report this completed appointment average wait time data monthly. VA also regularly advises and updates Veterans service organizations and congressional stakeholders on our patient access data and wait time methods.

The VA continues to strive to meet every Veteran's health care needs and access to health care is a top priority at VA. Below are links to resources that can help you learn more about access to VA health care.

Resources – (click links below to open in new tab)

[Find VA Locations – VA](#)

[Veterans Transportation Service Locations – VA](#)

[Contact VA Telehealth Services – VA](#)

[Patient Access Data – VHA](#)

American Heart Month



Quality of care for Veteran's includes raising awareness around important health topics. By highlighting some of the national health awareness campaigns each month, Veterans can get ideas, information, and resources on a variety of health matters.

February is American Heart Month and we want to raise awareness on the conditions that affect the heart.

Cardiovascular disease or heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Heart disease includes several problems, many of which are related to a condition known as atherosclerosis, a condition that develops when a substance called plaque builds up in the walls of the arteries. This buildup makes the arteries smaller, making it harder for blood to flow through them. If a blood clot forms, it can stop blood flow. This can cause a heart attack or stroke.

A heart attack happens when the blood flow to a part of the heart is blocked by a blood clot. If this clot cuts off the blood flow completely, the part of the heart muscle supplied by that artery begins to die. Most people survive their first heart attack, but depending on the damage your doctor may prescribe medicine and recommend lifestyle changes.

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel that feeds the brain gets blocked, usually from a blood clot or when a blood vessel within the brain bursts. When the blood supply to a part of the brain is shut off, brain cells will die. The result will be the inability to do normal things as before such as walking or talking. Some strokes can be severe resulting in death.

Other Types of Heart Disease

- **Heart failure:** Heart failure means the heart isn't pumping blood as well as it should. The heart keeps working, but the body's need for blood and oxygen is not being met. Heart failure can get worse if not treated. If you or a loved one has heart failure, it's very important to seek medical attention immediately and follow the doctor's orders.
- **Arrhythmia:** This is an abnormal rhythm of the heart. The heart can beat too slowly, too fast or irregularly. An arrhythmia can affect how well the heart works. The heart may not be able to pump enough blood to meet the body's needs.
- **Heart valve problems:** When heart valves don't open enough or don't close properly.

The most common symptom of heart disease is chest pain. It's described as an uncomfortable feeling of heaviness or pressure in the chest. Some might also experience a burning, squeezing or aching feeling in the chest.

Other possible signs of heart problems include:

- Anxiety
- Shortness of breath
- Rapid or irregular pulse
- Nausea or lack of appetite
- Sweating

- Fatigue

Some people mistake heart pain with indigestion or heartburn. That's why it's important to seek medical assistance if you think you may be suffering from a serious heart condition.

Exercising, eating a healthy diet, not smoking and maintaining a proper weight can reduce your risks of heart disease. Talk to your health care provider to discuss what you can do to avoid heart related problems and live a healthy life.

Resources (click links below to open in new tab)

Cardiac Stress Tests (Video) – Veterans Health Library

Heart & Blood Vessel Problems - Veterans Health Library

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Quality of care for Veterans includes raising awareness around important health topics. By highlighting some of the national health awareness campaigns each month, Veterans can get ideas, information, and resources on a variety of health matters.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and we're here to let Veterans know the importance of getting screened and early detection. For more than 23 years the VA has led the nation in breast cancer screenings and has focused on coordination of care and improving access to screenings. In 2015, VA screened 86 percent of its women Veteran patients age 50-74, compared with the private sector at 73 percent.

Each year, approximately 200,000 women in the U.S. are diagnosed with breast cancer, making it the second most common cancer in women. In other words, approximately one in eight females will develop breast cancer at some point in life.

Breast cancer is a disease where abnormal cells in the breast grow uncontrollably and form lumps or tumors. If left untreated, the cancer can spread to other parts of the body. Both men and women can have breast cancer, although male breast cancer is less common.

Early detection and knowing how to lower your chances of getting breast cancer can help you and your loved ones live healthy lives. That's why it's important to get screened and learn about the risk factors.

Risk factors include:

- Getting older
- Being female
- Having a close family member with breast cancer
- Not exercising and having certain gene mutations
- Being overweight or obese
- Previous radiation therapy/exposure to the breasts or chest

By maintaining a healthy weight, getting regular exercise, and limiting alcohol consumption you can help reduce your risk of breast cancer.

VA recommends all women begin getting yearly mammograms by age 45, and every other year beginning at age 55. A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast and is one of the most common screenings for breast cancer. Routine screenings can often find breast cancer early and make treatment more successful.

The VA provides mammograms for all Veterans, with 45 facilities providing on-site services using digital mammography along with mobile mammography, allowing Veterans in rural areas of the country to get screenings and have their mammograms read by a VA breast radiologist, without traveling far from home.

By talking to your health care provider and knowing the proper precautions to take, you and your loved ones can live healthy lives. Remember that early detection is the key in helping your chances of surviving breast cancer.