

VA



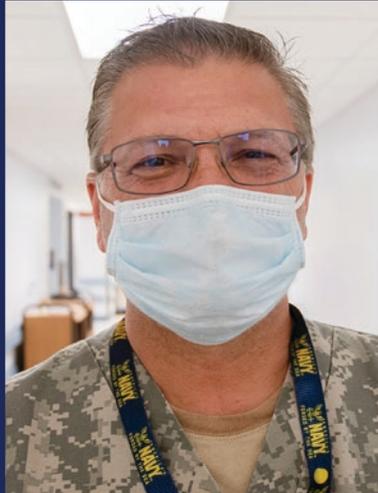
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
VA Healthcare-VISN 4

# VISION

for Excellence

Newsletter for Veterans and Stakeholders in VISN 4

Issue 28



## Keeping Our Veterans Safe



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

I'm extremely proud of front-line staff who have cared for our Veterans during the pandemic. Our feature story provides a celebration of all the great work VISN 4 staff have done in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The dedication of VISN 4 employees is unparalleled, as they continue to exhibit bravery and professional competency knowing that their actions and efforts during this national emergency will help safeguard patients, visitors, fellow staff members, and healthcare operations.

To help out during the pandemic, many VISN 4 staff received additional duties or volunteered their personal time to assist medical centers and nursing homes in combating the transmission and spread of coronavirus. Many of our VISN 4 staff stepped up and traveled to help out in hot spots across the country. Nearly 150 of our staff have volunteered to deploy or are deployed on over 300 (14) day deployments to assist in VA facilities or state nursing homes in New York City, New Jersey, New Orleans, Pennsylvania, and most recently Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas and Arizona. I'm truly grateful for everyone's contributions, and I know we'll overcome this difficult period together.

Inside this issue, I am also pleased to highlight several winners of our VISN 4 I CARE Award. This award is presented quarterly to an employee or team who not only demonstrates our I CARE values, but who go the extra mile to live by our I CARE ideals.

On behalf of all VISN 4 employees, I thank all Veterans and their families for continuing to utilize VISN 4 for your health care needs. Please stay safe, continue to wear your masks, keep your distance, and wash your hands.

It is our honor to serve you.

Sincerely,

Timothy W. Liezert  
Network Director



## VA Healthcare-VISN 4 Leadership Team

**Timothy W. Liezert**  
Network Director  
Since September 2019

**Charles R. Thilges**  
Deputy Network Director  
Since January 2018

**Timothy Burke, M.D.**  
Chief Medical Officer  
Since March 2016

**Joseph Haverstick**  
Chief Financial Officer  
Since May 2019

**Moira M. Hughes, FACHE**  
Quality Management Officer  
Since April 2014

**Teneal Caw**  
Human Resources Officer  
Since August 2012

**David E. Cowgill**  
Communications Manager  
Since January 2007

**Jo Petro**  
Executive Assistant  
Since January 2018



◀ (L-R) VISN 4 Network Director Timothy Liezert, U.S. Secretary for Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie and Corporal Michael J. Crescenzo VA Medical Center Director Karen Flaherty-Oxler tour the medical center campus in Philadelphia on July 21.

# AROUND the NETWORK

## Butler VA Receives Award for Overall Excellence in Patient Experience

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently recognized the Butler VA Health Care System for Overall Excellence in Patient Experience.

The Butler VA was among 8 finalists across the country who exemplified exceptional Patient Experience and Employee Experience scores in patient satisfaction, trust and VA's All Employee Survey (AES) Best Places To Work. Programs such as the New Veteran Orientation Tour, Own The Moment training, and Veterans Input Pool have all contributed to the overall patient and employee experience.

"As the new Director for the Butler VA Health Care System, I am blessed to work with such an awesome and dedicated team. Each day I am amazed at what they accomplish," comments Kevin Amick, Director. "We really are a family here, partners in the delivery of health care for our Veterans. I am so pleased that staff were recognized for their dedication, advocacy and customer service to our Veterans. Thank you team Butler!"

The award was announced during a national virtual VA Patient Experience Awards event which replaced this year's VA Patient Experience Symposium, which was attended by more than 400 VA health care leaders in 2019 for the sole purpose of sharing best practices and improving customer experience at VA health care facilities across the nation.

"These Patient Experience Awards recognize those in the Veterans Health Administration who are helping lead the way in customer service, helping lead the way in care and innovations that are nationally recognized for the significant, tangible improvements they bring to Veterans' healing," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie.

**"We really are a family here, partners in the delivery of health care for our Veterans."**

**Kevin Amick, Director  
Butler VA Health Care System**

Learning from best practices in both VA and private sector, VA has created and implemented several VA Patient Experience tools to ensure every employee is trained and focused on providing Veterans not only with the care they need, but also with care that is delivered in an exceptional and consistent manner.

Trust in VA health care has increased 5% and trust in all VA benefits and services has increased 19% since 2017. Butler VA enjoys a current trust score of 94.7%.

While the Department of Veterans Affairs continues to address the critical care needs of Veterans and their families during the pandemic – VA employees are constantly innovating to provide the best possible patient experience.

For more information on VA Patient Experience or the VA Veterans Experience Office, visit <https://www.va.gov/ve/>.



# Keeping Veterans Safe



## *Our COVID-19 Response*

In VISN 4, we are phasing in the opening of many of our services halted due to COVID-19. Erie was our lead site for reopening, and the other sites have followed.

Safety remains our top priority. While VA health care will look different moving forward, Veterans can continue to rely on their VA health care team for safe, high-quality care. We have been expanding select services gradually, thoughtfully, and safely to ensure that Veterans with the greatest clinical needs are able to receive the right care at the right time and in the safest environment possible.

Virtual and telephone appointments for routine care will be the new path forward. We will continue to offer virtual and phone appointments for most routine visits as appropriate. These options will be discussed when Veterans call to schedule an appointment.

We are asking Veterans to call first to schedule an appointment before visiting a VA clinic for any health care needs so we can provide the safest environment of care for all Veterans.

If Veterans have urgent or time-sensitive needs, they will continue to be seen face-to-face if their provider feels it's medically necessary. If a Veteran needs to come in for a face-to-face visit, we ask that Veterans help keep others safe by following safety precautions.

We are also making changes to waiting areas, check-in desks, and other common spaces to encourage physical distancing. Veterans will be asked to maintain a 6-foot separation between them and others where possible. Additional space between seating, plexiglass panels, limited elevator capacity, and visual markings on floors are just a few of the changes Veterans will notice at our facilities.



**Safety precautions to protect our Veterans health include:**

- Actively screening all patients, visitors, and employees entering our facility and VA clinics.
- Requiring all Veterans, visitors, and employees to wear a mask while on-site. Veterans may either bring their own or we will provide one.
- Limiting visitors. When possible, we ask that Veterans not bring family members or visitors with them to a health care appointment. If a Veteran would like to have a family member involved, we can make other arrangements as needed.
- Continuing to thoroughly disinfect and clean high-touch surfaces as we follow environmental cleaning recommendations outlined by the CDC.



## A Journey to Recovery



Veteran Richard Bedalota raised his arm in victory as he was “clapped out” of VA Pittsburgh’s acute care hospital in Oakland on May 27 after a long stay battling COVID-19.

Mr. Bedalota was in intensive care and on a ventilator for several weeks. He was transferred to the community living center in O’Hara Township for rehabilitation.

# Our Fourth Mission

VHA's Fourth Mission is the 'safety net' when private health care and states are overwhelmed during a disaster and require assistance, and VISN 4 answered the call many times in our history.

Nearly 150 of our staff have volunteered to deploy or are deployed on over 300 (14) day deployments to assist in VA facilities or state nursing homes in hot spot areas including New York City, New Jersey, New Orleans, Pennsylvania, and most recently Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas and Arizona.



## Mobile Check-in with VEText

Several of our VISN 4 sites are implementing mobile check-in using VEText. Mobile check-in is a new feature of VEText, VA's text-messaging appointment reminder system that works with the mobile phone number in each Veteran's health record. Veterans will be given a card with instructions on how to check in, and signs will be posted throughout parking areas.

Clinic staff can monitor arrivals on the VEText tab of their clinic check-in menu. All providers will allow additional time for Veterans to get to the clinic from their parking spots after text notification.

Veterans who don't have a mobile phone or can't text from their phone will be instructed to report to the clinic no earlier than 15 minutes before the appointment time.



### MOBILE CHECK-IN INSTRUCTIONS

- 1** TEXT "HERE" TO 53079 using your cell phone.
- 2** SIT TIGHT. Remain in your vehicle or outside.
- 3** WAIT FOR INSTRUCTIONS. We will text you once you can enter.

# Tips to Refill Your VA Prescriptions



As COVID-19 spreads, people who regularly take prescription drugs for chronic conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure may be wondering what will happen with their refills. VA wants you to know we're working hard to make sure you get your prescriptions on time, and when you need them.

We ask that you request refills of your VA Prescriptions as soon as possible. VA will process your refill request and have it sent to you before you're scheduled to run out.

## ***How do Veterans request refills of their prescriptions?***

To prevent waste and reduce the risk that unneeded medications could fall into the wrong hands, VA does not automatically refill medications. To receive a medication refill authorized by your VA prescriber, you must actively request a refill using one of the methods described below:

- **Online with My HealtheVet:** You can request refills of your refillable VA-issued prescriptions, track VA prescription deliveries, view VA prescription history online.
- **The NEW Rx Refill Mobile App:** You can request refills of your refillable VA-issued prescriptions, track VA prescription deliveries, view VA prescription history from the convenience of your mobile device.
- **Telephone Call:** Most VA Pharmacies have automated telephone refill lines. You can find the phone number of your local VA Pharmacy on your prescription label. To order refills by phone, you will need the prescription number (shown as RX # on the prescription label) and your Social Security Number. For many prescriptions that are no longer refillable, this automated system may allow you to send a request for more of this medication to be sent to you. For some medications, the healthcare team will need to contact you first.
- **By Mail:** VA Pharmacy provides a refill request form with each prescription filled. To refill by mail, please complete the request form and mail it to your VA pharmacy at the address listed on the paperwork that arrives with your prescription.

The COVID-19 situation is changing fast. Try not to forget to take your medications or refill your prescriptions. Not having certain medications could cause health problems that require medical attention, putting you at risk of exposure with a facility visit. Veterans who forget to re-order their medications in time have three options. You can contact your VA medical center pharmacy, call the phone number on the prescription label, or use My HealtheVet's Secure Messaging (sign in required) to get in touch with your health care team, especially if your prescription is no longer refillable.

As a last resort, you may visit your VA pharmacy in person to request a refill. You may be subject to screening before entering the facility. You might also have a very long wait to have your prescription refilled. Visiting in person can unnecessarily put you and others at risk of infection.

Delivery times can be affected by weather and the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the Track Delivery feature on My HealtheVet (sign in required), you can obtain the tracking number in use by either the U.S. Postal Service or UPS.

Keeping yourself healthy is one of the best ways to defend yourself against COVID-19. VA knows that this can be a stressful time for Veterans, make sure you're doing everything you can to keep your immune system strong and healthy.



# Continuing the Mission for Veteran's Care

Under the MISSION Act, Veterans have more access to health care. VA provides health care for Veterans from providers in your local community outside of VA. Veterans may be eligible to receive care from a community provider when VA cannot provide the care needed. This care is provided on behalf of and paid for by VA.

Community care is available to Veterans based on certain conditions and eligibility requirements, and in consideration of a Veteran's specific needs and circumstances. Community care must be first authorized by VA before a Veteran can receive care from a community provider.

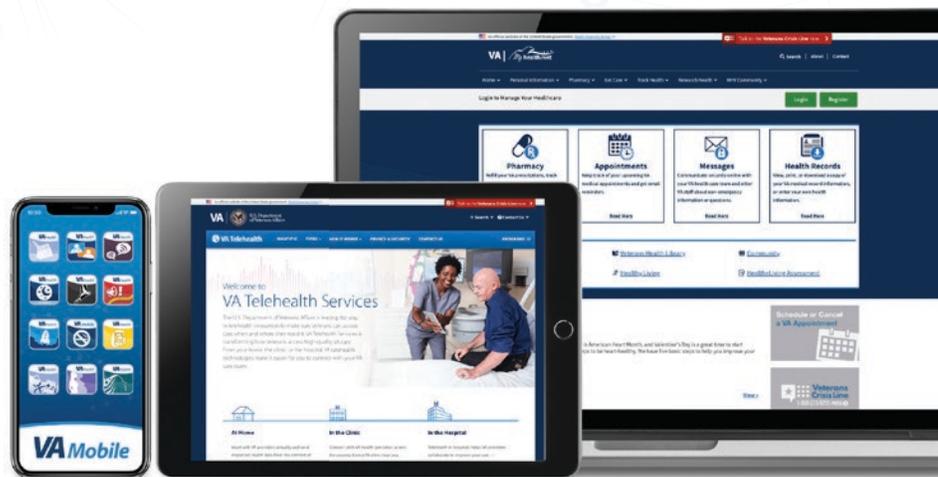
	Care in the Community Consults <sup>1</sup>	Non-VA Unique Patients <sup>2</sup>
FY17	74,568	58,699
FY18	87,707	62,428
FY19	101,069	70,382
FY20 (as of 8/16/20)	135,218	81,613

(1) Scheduled and completed consults

(2) Number of unique enrolled Veterans who receive community care at VA expense

## Office of CONNECTED CARE

Wherever you are,  
Connected Care  
technologies are there.



### Access Your VA Health Information Online

Join the **millions of Veterans** who use My HealtheVet to view their health records, schedule their appointments, refill their prescriptions, and send secure messages to their providers.

### Take Charge of Your Health and Wellness

Find innovative health management tools on the VA App Store, which features **over 40 free mobile apps** created to help Veterans, their caregivers, and VA care teams.

### Connect With Your VA Care Team From Anywhere

Use VA telehealth technologies to meet with your VA care team, no matter the distance. In 2019, Veterans participated in more than **2.6 million telehealth episodes**, many from their own homes.



Get Started Today!  
[connectedcare.va.gov](https://connectedcare.va.gov)



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Connected Care

# Improving Access

So far in fiscal year 2020, 96% of all appointments in VISN 4 were completed within 30 days of the Veteran's preferred date. Our facilities

have conducted more than 1.7 million appointments already this year, and the average wait time has been 4.8 days. (Data as of August 15, 2020)

Clinics	Number of Appointments	Wait Time <30 days (#)	Wait Time <30 days (%)	Average Wait (days)
All Clinics	1,741,968	1,658,477	96.0%	4.8
Mental Health	219,933	212,583	97.6%	3.3
Primary Care	320,483	313,944	98.0%	3.4
Specialty Care	547,444	498,612	93.0%	7.6

## Average Wait Times at VISN 4 Facilities

The table below shows how many days new or returning patients waited for a primary care or mental health care appointment in the last 30 days as of July 27, 2020. Coatesville, Philadelphia, and Wilmington are all considered high Medicaid-accepting communities.

The data on the table was obtained from VA's access and quality website

located at [www.accesstocare.va.gov](http://www.accesstocare.va.gov). The website also shows the wait times for each outpatient clinic and specialty care clinics (where available), and it includes Veteran satisfaction data and some comparisons with other local hospitals.

This information is not offered by any other major national hospital organization in the country.

VISN 4 Facility	Primary Care		Mental Health Care	
	New	Returning	New	Returning
ALTOONA	22	2	2	2
BUTLER	20	2	16	5
COATESVILLE	16	1	8	3
ERIE	21	6	12	1
LEBANON	4	5	16	3
PHILADELPHIA	5	4	6	0
PITTSBURGH - UNIVERSITY DRIVE	11	5	8	2
PITTSBURGH - H.J. HEINZ	8	6	13	5
WILKES-BARRE	11	2	5	4
WILMINGTON	5	7	7	2

Above data routinely updated and obtained from [www.accesstocare.va.gov](http://www.accesstocare.va.gov).

# Emergency Care Notifications

During a medical emergency, Veterans should immediately seek care at the nearest medical facility. If a Veteran believes his or her life or health is in danger, call 911 or report to the nearest emergency department right away.

It is, however, important to promptly notify VA within 72 hours of presenting to the emergency room because this:

- Allows VA to assist the Veteran in coordinating necessary care or transfer.
- Helps ensure that the administrative and clinical requirements for VA to pay for the care are met.
- May impact a Veteran's eligibility for VA to cover the cost of emergency treatment.

Providers, Veterans and representatives can utilize any one of the following options to report notification:

- [VHAEmergencyNotification@va.gov](mailto:VHAEmergencyNotification@va.gov)
- 844-72HRVHA (844-724-7842)
- Appropriate VA official at the nearest VA medical facility

The person notifying VA should be prepared to supply the case specific information detailed in the Non-VA Hospital Emergency Notification, VA Form 10-10143g, when calling or emailing notification.

Learn more:  
[https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/providers/info\\_EmergencyCare.asp](https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/providers/info_EmergencyCare.asp)





*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

### FY19 3rd Quarter Awardees

**Christina Beaver, LCSW and Kelly Fulmer, RN, ACRN**  
*Butler VA Health Care System*



*Christina Beaver, LCSW*

Christie and Kelly worked tirelessly in their efforts to support and advocate for justice involved Veterans. Through their efforts, the Veterans Justice Outreach program has grown exponentially in its efforts to outreach and engage Veterans in VA and treatment services, including jail outreach in 5 counties, Veterans treatment courts in 3 counties, interactions with multiple magisterial courts, collaboration with local, state and federal justice systems.

interactions with multiple magisterial courts, collaboration with local, state and federal justice systems.

Both Christie and Kelly participate in multiple community outreach efforts throughout Butler’s catchment area to educate and inform law enforcement, community social service providers and leaders of the unique needs and resources available to justice involved Veterans. They have sought out extensive training and have in turn been recognized as subject matter experts in recovery based models of treatment including Moral Reconciliation Therapy and Strength At Home. These programs address the underlying experiences and behaviors which place Veterans at risk for various psychosocial and relationship problems which may contribute to and/or result in legal consequences.



*Kelly Fulmer, RN, ACRN*

### FY19 4th Quarter Awardee

**Gina Lucchesi, MSW, LSW**  
*Coatesville VA Medical Center*

Gina has gone above and beyond for more than two months with case management services to assist a homeless Veteran with housing. He was living in a motel but did not have the funds to continue paying. He refused to leave his dog and thus could not reside in any VA or grant & per diem programs or any local shelters. He also had limited mobility and needed medical care.

Gina assisted to extend his stay at the hotel and contacted multiple community resources for potential funding. She also informed him about possible housing programs, helped him apply, and ensured that he was able to obtain necessary medical care. She then connected with Lucky Dawg Animal Rescue, who agreed to assist with temporary foster care for his dog and raise funds for additional nights at the hotel.

Gina was then able to assist him with interviewing and placement in one of Coatesville’s grant & per diem housing programs. She stayed connected with him while he resided in this program and helped him apply for HUD-VASH.

He is now living in an apartment in the community with his dog. Gina’s commitment, advocacy, and dedication to recovery-oriented care led to a successful and positive outcome for this Veteran.

## FY20 1st Quarter Awardees

### **Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service** *James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center*

Over the past year, all Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service (PM&RS) staff have implemented innovative services via clinical video telehealth to conduct remote visits and to reduce the need for Veterans to travel.

Additionally, the PM&RS staff have delivered onsite rehab services with hands-on therapists at the Dubois, State College and Huntingdon outpatient clinics. Audiology services are being planned at the Indiana and Huntingdon outpatient clinics, and PT/OT services to are being planned at the Indiana and Johnstown outpatient clinics in FY20.

Throughout this process all clinicians have volunteered to spearhead these creative avenues to expand PM&RS services. The department has seen a nearly 28% increase in patient encounters. The entire team has demonstrated a commitment to the Veterans and support these clinics by providing same-day walk-in clinic care.

The PM&RS team has demonstrated enthusiasm and creativity with travelling to other sites, learning new skills, changing the delivery models of care, expanding tele-PT/OT/Speech, and assisting staff on extended leave during these recent changes. This teamwork represents the highest levels of what I CARE means. Most importantly, Veterans get the care and programs they need, benefiting the Whole Health model. They receive care significantly faster than before and at a level not seen in the community.



## FY20 2nd Quarter Awardees

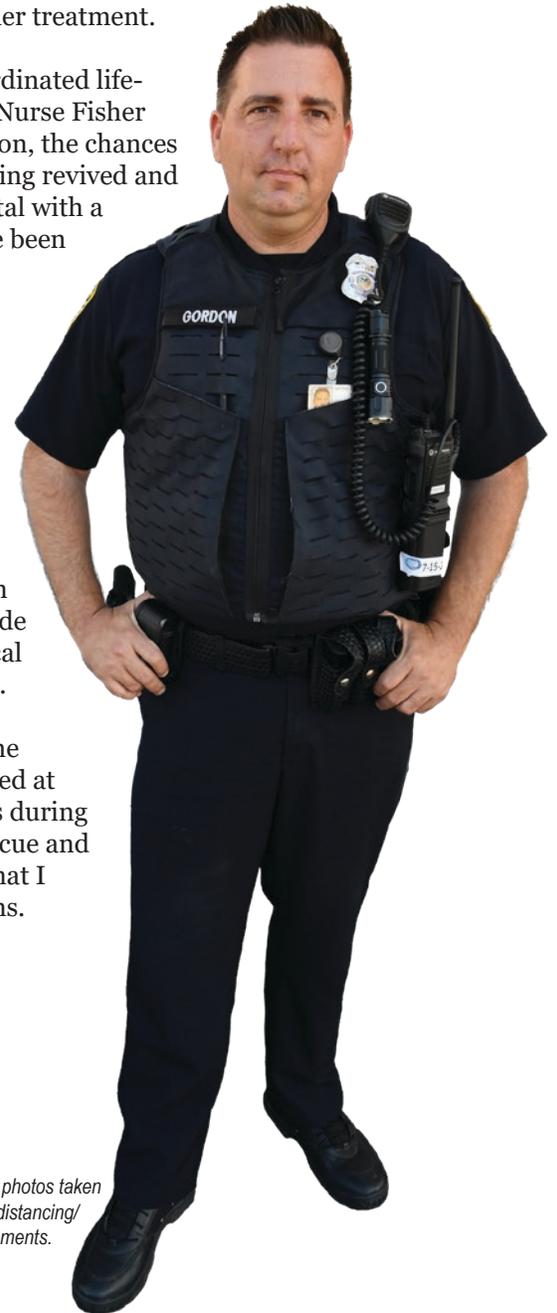
### **Police Officer David Gordon and Trinette Fisher, RN** *Lebanon VA Medical Center*

VA Police Officer David Gordon and Nurse Trinette Fisher responded to a motor vehicle accident where they found the driver unresponsive and not breathing. VA Police extracted the driver from the vehicle, deployed an AED, and performed CPR until medical staff arrived. The driver was then transported to a community hospital for further treatment.

Without the coordinated life-saving efforts of Nurse Fisher and Officer Gordon, the chances of this patient being revived and sent to the hospital with a pulse would have been greatly reduced.

They both put themselves in harm's way by entering an active motor vehicle accident scene without regard to their personal safety in an effort to provide life-saving medical care to a Veteran.

They exhibited the teamwork required at the highest levels during this dramatic rescue and demonstrated what I CARE truly means.



*EDITOR'S NOTE - Some photos taken prior to COVID-19 social distancing/universal masking requirements.*

Learn more at  
[www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)

# My HealthVet

## Pharmacy – Manage Your Prescriptions and Medications Online

Are you seeking an easier way to refill your VA prescriptions? Want help with keeping your medicines organized? Use My HealthVet to keep your prescriptions straight. The [My HealthVet](#) online prescription tools allow you to refill your VA prescriptions (Rx), track their delivery, get VA prescription shipment notifications, create medication lists and more.\*

\*To refill your VA prescriptions, you must have an Advanced or Premium My HealthVet account.

### How Can My HealthVet’s Pharmacy Tools Benefit You?

Here are examples of ways VA Patients are already using the My HealthVet pharmacy tools.



#### Refill VA Prescriptions (Rx)

To use Rx Refill, you need an active prescription with refills that was written by a VA doctor and previously filled at a VA Pharmacy.



#### Track Delivery of VA Prescriptions

This feature allows you to track delivery of your VA Mail Order Pharmacy prescriptions mailed in the last 30 days so you know when your prescriptions should arrive.



#### Prescription (Rx) Refill Shipment Notifications

You may choose to get email notifications to let you know when to expect delivery of your VA prescriptions.



#### Medication Lists

This tool allows you to keep track of your medications, including over the counter medicines and herbals/supplements.



# VA

U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health  
Administration  
VA Healthcare–  
VISN 4

#### VA Healthcare-VISN 4

1010 Delafield Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15215  
412-822-3316  
[www.visn4.va.gov](http://www.visn4.va.gov)

#### Vision for Excellence - Issue 28

Executive Editor ..... *David E. Cowgill*  
Layout & Design ..... *Louis Scavnicky*

#### 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 412-822-3318 or [david.cowgill@va.gov](mailto:david.cowgill@va.gov).