



# Newsletter

Iowa City VAHCS • Spring 2015



**VA** HEALTH CARE | Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

VIST Appointments ..(319) 338-0581 x 6878  
 VIST Coordinator .....(319) 338-0581 x 6889  
 VIST Fax .....(319) 339-7121  
 Prosthetics .....(319) 338-0581 x 6309

## *The FACTS: You Are Not Alone*

- ✓ Approximately 135,000 blind Veterans in the U.S.
- ✓ Nearly 1,000 legally blind Veterans served by the Iowa City VAHCS
- ✓ Estimated 7,000 Veterans served by the Iowa City VAHCS  
Veterans cannot read newsprint, prescription bottles, or VA appointment letters even with glasses
- ✓ Iowa City, 2014: Nearly 80 legally blind Veterans were identified and added to the VIST Program

## VIST

VIST is a group of health care professionals dedicated to connecting visually impaired Veterans with a variety of services available within VA and the Veterans community.

### VIST Services include:

- Benefits and eligibility review
- Assessment
- Referral for adjustment to blind rehabilitation training
- Review of prosthetics

VIST's Goal is to improve the quality of life for the visually impaired Veteran. Services will be coordinated through the case manager (VIST coordinator).

# Iowa City VIST Coordinator

My name is Keith Queen and I grew up in Michigan. Vision problems began for me in elementary school, and as a young adult I was diagnosed with Stargardt's disorder. It is, in part, why I chose this occupation. As a VIST Coordinator, it is rewarding to be able to improve the quality of life for visually impaired Veterans.



H. "Keith" Queen

## Education and Work Experience

- Masters of Arts in Teaching Blind Rehabilitation
- Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist
- Certified Low Vision Therapist

I have worked at the Blind Rehabilitation Center in VA West Haven (Connecticut), and served as a VA VIST Coordinator in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Iowa City. I also served two years in the United States Peace Corps.

## Importance of Annual Eye Exams

In 2012, my health care team suggested I get an eye exam. I'm glad I listened to them, because the eye exam changed my life. I was also diagnosed with glaucoma, and began blind rehabilitation assessment and training.

Annual eye exams are important because they may help identify vision changes and developing conditions.

## Staying In Touch

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Veterans that may benefit from or need services are encouraged to stay in touch. The VIST Coordinator tracks Veterans health care and suggests VIST services by reviewing notes and eye exams. If there is a change in life or health requiring special attention (move, significant medical change, death in the family), please contact the VIST Coordinator.

## ***Private Eye Exam***

If you receive a private (non-VA) eye exam, encourage the ophthalmologist to fax or mail the exam to:

***Attn: Keith Queen, VIST  
Iowa City VAHCS  
Fax (319) 339-7121***

***Attn: Keith Queen, VIST  
Iowa City VAHCS  
601 Hwy 6 West  
Iowa City, IA 52246***

## ***Phone***

The VIST Coordinator has appointments with Veterans throughout the day and may not always be able to answer the phone. Leave a message and he will get back to you as soon as possible.

Please leave the following information so Keith may better assist you, prior to returning your call.

- Full name
- Last four of the Veterans Social Security number
- Brief message stating the concern or need

If you haven't heard from the VIST Coordinator, and have an urgent need or question, call:

- Your Primary Care Team
- VA Nurse Health Care Advice: 1-866-687-7382

## ***VA Blind Rehabilitation Services***

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The Veterans Administration directs different types of high-quality Blind Rehabilitation programs. The VIST Coordinator will help determine the best programs for your needs.

### ***Blind Rehabilitation Center (BRC)***

**Central Blind Rehabilitation Center, located in Hines, IL**

The Blind Rehabilitation Center is a residential program that provide adjustment to blindness training. It offers a variety of courses designed to help blind Veterans achieve a realistic level

of independence. These skill areas include:

- Orientation and mobility
- Communication skills
- Activities of daily living
- Manual skills
- Visual skills
- Computer access training
- Social/recreational activities
- Emotional/Behavioral Adjustment

## ***Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Service (BROS)***

**Central Iowa VAHCS, located in Des Moines, IA**

A BROS specialist is an experienced blind rehabilitation instructor. BROS instructors teach skills in the Veterans home environment and/or VA Health Care System. The BROS instructor is prepared to help with: orientation and mobility; living skills; manual skills and visual skills. He or she may also be able to assist with computer access training.

## ***Visual Impairment Services Outpatient Rehabilitation (VISORS)***

**Minneapolis VAHCS, located in Minneapolis, MN**

VISOR programs provide short-term blind and vision rehabilitation. They provide overnight accommodations throughout the two week training. In addition to the low vision and orientation and mobility services, VISOR also provides training in communication, activities of daily living and computer use.

Communication instruction include:

- Typing
- Handwriting
- Telling time
- Management of financial records
- Recording devices and other electronic equipment

Activities of daily living include:

- Making a cup of coffee
- Arranging an entire wardrobe
- Shopping
- Kitchen organization
- Preparing complete meals

Computer training include:

- An adaptive needs assessment
- Training on appropriate computer equipment
- Assigning of equipment upon completion of training
- Follow-up technical support

## ***State Department for the Blind Services***

The VIST Coordinator may also work with state resources in Iowa and Illinois. The Iowa Department for the Blind operates Independent Living, Vocational Rehabilitation and Residential Training Programs.

***Not all visually impaired Veterans are blind, an estimated 7,000 Veterans, served by the Iowa City VAHCS, are categorized as 'Low Vision'.***

## **Types of Low Vision**

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**Near Viewing:**

- Hobbies
- Job related duties
- Reading prescription bottles, menus, and thermostats

**Intermediate Viewing:**

- Watching TV

**Distance Viewing:**

- Street signs
- Menu displays in restaurants
- Isle signs in stores
- Watching sporting events

# Low Vision Evaluations

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Low vision evaluations determine the Veterans level of vision and the best optical aids for your needs. The VIST Coordinator will arrange for a low vision evaluation.

**Low vision evaluations may be completed at:**

- **Blind Rehabilitation Center, Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital,** located in Hines, IL
- **Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Services, VA Central Iowa Health Care System,** located in Des Moines, IA
- **Local Non-VA Low Vision Clinics**

## *Prosthetic Requests*

During the low vision evaluation a report is created. The VIST Coordinator will call to discuss the report and the devices recommended for you.

Then the Coordinator will communicate with the Prosthetics Department and order the devices you would like to receive.

Equipment is generally ordered within two days, and should be delivered in 3-4 weeks. If the equipment is not received by the end of week four, contact the VIST Coordinator or the Prosthetics Department.

## Changes and Quality of Life

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Aging brings with it the possibility of further vision loss, as well as reduced physical and mental abilities. These changes may affect the ability to perform daily tasks, and lead to increased frustration, safety concerns, depression, and dissatisfaction with life.

Quality of life is important at any age. If changes are occurring and routine activities are not as easy as they have been in the past contact the VIST Coordinator. Low vision training, adjustment to blindness training, support/peer groups or technology devices may make significant improvements.

## ***Evaluate Quality of Life***

These are a few questions to help evaluate quality of life. Can you:

1. Travel safely inside and outside without fear of falling?
2. Prepare meals safely, without fear of cutting, burning or harming yourself?
3. Clean your home or environment properly?
4. Participate in hobbies?
5. Make and receive telephone calls without help?
6. Send e-mails, search the web, shop, and bank on a computer?
7. Read this newsletter without help?
8. Make a list of tasks which are no longer "do-able"?
9. Depend on yourself or wait for others to perform tasks for you?

## **Additional Resources**

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### ***MyHealthVet***

MyHealthVet is VA's online personal health record that helps the Veteran partner with their health care team. You may access it at:

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

For assistance contact the Iowa City MyHealthlyVet Coordinator:  
Charity Holstein, (319) 688-3707

### ***Home Telehealth***

For Veterans who have a health problem like diabetes, chronic heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, getting treatment can be difficult.

Conditions like these may make it difficult for them live independently. Some may need to go into a nursing home where symptoms and vital signs (pulse, weight, temperature etc.) can be checked frequently.

Home Telehealth is a new technology that makes it possible to check on symptoms and measure vital signs at home. Telehealth connects Veterans at home to VA using equipment and phone lines.

Ask your Primary Care Team about Home Telehealth.

### ***Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT)***

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC's) were created to bring VA care closer to home for Veterans. However, they may not have specialty services, such as Eye Clinic. Many CBOCs have CVT capability, allowing Veterans to connect with specialty clinics at the Iowa City VA Medical Center.

CVT uses these telehealth technologies to make diagnoses, manage care, perform check-ups, and provide care.

Ask the VIST Coordinator, Eye Clinic Team or Primary Care staff if CVT is available in your CBOC.

### ***Groups Activities***

#### **Mental Health Support Group- for the Veteran**

Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) and VIST began this group in January 2015. Amanda Marson and Carla Levin are counselors and lead the support group. It meets the last Wednesday of the month, from 2:00pm-3:00pm.

#### **Care for Caregiver**

Connie Holms, Caregiver Support Coordinator, will meet with spouses, family members and caregivers. The support group meet the last Wednesday of the month, from 2:00pm-3:00pm.

Contact the VIST Coordinator about group activities.

# National Recreational Events

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There are many opportunities for fun, recreation and travel!

If you would like more information or to participate, please contact the VIST coordinator.

## ***Local Events:***

- Castaways Fishing Event (June 6-13, 2015)

## ***National Events:***

- National Veterans Golden Age Games  
[www.va.gov/opa/speceven/gag/](http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/gag/)
- National Veterans Wheelchair Games  
[www.va.gov/opa/speceven/wcg/](http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/wcg/)
- National Veterans Creative Arts Festival  
[www.va.gov/opa/speceven/caf/index.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/caf/index.asp)
- National Veterans Winter Sports Clinic  
[www.va.gov/opa/speceven/wsc/](http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/wsc/)
- National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic  
[www.va.gov/opa/speceven/ssc/](http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/ssc/)
- National Veterans TEE Tournament  
[www.va.gov/opa/speceven/tee/](http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/tee/)
- Additional National Resources:  
[www.rehab.va.gov/blindrehab/](http://www.rehab.va.gov/blindrehab/)

## ***Powerful Thoughts***

I believe our thoughts are powerful and determine our actions, behaviors and attitude. What we read and who we surround ourselves with have brought us to where we are today and are a good indicator of where we are going. Attitude plays a big role in how we handle change and challenges.

*Here's to good thoughts!*

*Iowa City VAHCS • Spring 2015*

# VIST Newsletter

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Iowa City VA Health Care System  
601 Hwy 6 West  
Iowa City, IA 52246

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