Mission of the VA Caregiver Support Program: to promote the health and well-being of family Caregivers who care for our nation’s Veterans, through education, resources, support, and services.

Caregiver Support Line Telephone Education Group

May 12th, 20th, 27th
Goodbye to Going it Alone: Learning to Ask for Help
June 9th, 17th, 24th
Balance in the Eye of the Storm: Self Care When Caring for A Loved One With Mental Health Concerns

For a referral, call your Caregiver Support Coordinator.

Caregiver Support Line
Offering support, resources, tools and a listening ear.

Toll-free Number: 1 (855) 260-3274
Monday-Friday 7:00am -10:00pm CT
Saturday 9:30am-5:00 pm CT
www.caregiver.va.gov

Spring is in bloom and it is time to “Go Green”!
By Connie Holmes, Caregiver Support Coordinator & Licensed Social Worker

In May, green ribbons and the color green signify Mental Health Awareness Month. The “Go Green” initiative comes from National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), a community partner.

To celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month the Caregiver Support Team joined forces with key members of Mental Health Services to provide the information highlighted in this issue of the ICVAHCS newsletter. Whether you are caring for a Veteran with a mental illness or struggling with your own, Mental Health support is available.

A team of VA Mental Health professionals and partners have organized “Go Green” events to take place at the Medical Center in Iowa City, and each Community Based Outpatient Clinic throughout May. Veterans, families and Caregivers are all welcome to attend the events. The events will provide time to talk with staff about VA and non-VA services.

On-site screenings for depression, anxiety and substance abuse will be available upon request with follow up assistance to connect with appropriate services. Education and Informational items will also be available and on display. Topics will include:

- Mental illness
- Women’s Mental Health
- Substance use disorders
- Suicide prevention
- Sleep hygiene
- Mindfulness breathing
- Relaxation techniques
- VA Mental Health Services and points of contact
- Community Partners Mental Health Services and points of contact
- Mental Health and Substance Abuse Recovery
- Anti-stigma

“Go Green” Events
The goal of the “Go Green” events is to provide health promotion and disease prevention information, as well as patient-centered, recovery-oriented care with increased accessibility to mental health services.
My Life, My Story

Our goal is to give the medical team the opportunity to get to know you better and learn about what’s most important to you in your daily life. The My Life, My Story project team believes each Veteran has a life story worth telling. This project allows Your Story to be included as part of your medical record. Research studies indicate health care teams who get to know patients well, provide better care.

The project team will encourage you to share what you would like to share; there will be no pressure to discuss “off limits” topics.

After the interview, a written, “draft” copy of Your Story will be created. You will be the editor of the draft copy and be allowed to make any changes you would like.

When satisfied with Your Story, the team will make two copies. One will be placed in your VA Medical Record. The second copy will be given to you, to keep for yourself, or to share with others.

If you would like more information, please contact:

- Stephanie Henrickson, MSN, RN, Veterans Program Manager
- Wendy Fahlgren, LISW, Women Veterans Program Manager, Patient-Centered Care & Cultural Transformation Coordinator

At: VHAIOWMyStory@va.gov or (319) 688-3359

Upcoming Event

Get into the ACT – Winneshiek County

The 6th Annual Older Americans Month Walk will be held Thursday, May 21, at 10:00 a.m. at the Winneshiek County Fairgrounds. The free one-mile Walk is meant to increase awareness about physical activity for older Iowans, and to celebrate the strength and vitality of older Americans. People of all ages are invited and encouraged to Get into the ACT the theme of this year’s walk.

A Wellness Fair will be open to the public before, during and after the walk. The goal of the fair is to help residents become familiar with services and products available to senior citizens and their caregivers in the area.

Check-in begins at 9:00 a.m. in the Danan Lansing Building located on the Fairgrounds followed by a program at 9:45 a.m. and walk at 10:00 a.m.

Registrations must be received by April 27 to guarantee a T-shirt! Register on-line at www.nei3a.org. Or, request a registration form from NEI3A in Decorah (PH: 563-382-2941). If you have questions, call 319-874-6850 or toll free at 1-866-468-7887.
Dimensions of Recovery

VA, in collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) offer the following as a definition of and four dimensions needed to support a life in Recovery.

“Recovery from Mental Disorders and/or Substance Use Disorders is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.”

**Health**
Overcoming or managing one’s disease(s) or symptoms and making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional wellbeing.

**Home**
Recovery requires a stable and safe place to live.

**Purpose**
People need to be involved in meaningful daily activities while also having the independence, income and resources to participate in society.

**Community**
The building of relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love and hope is needed for recovery to occur.

**How Do I Begin?**
As you read through this newsletter you may, or may not be struggling with your own Mental Health or Substance Use Disorder. Chances are if you are not facing either one, you are aware of someone who is currently on a journey or has taken one in the past.
The following are “pieces” of the journey to recovery. These pieces are good for everyone to become aware of as you may be able to help yourself, someone you provide care for or a friend in need of someone to listen.

**THE JOURNEY**
Mental health recovery is a journey: Like all journeys, it begins with a single step. The recovery journey is unique to each individual and there’s not a specific place to begin. The important thing is to take that first step, then keep going, and gather resources along the way to find success and satisfaction. Please select one of the pie pieces to help start your journey.

The descriptors may mean different things to different people. However, they are ideas that have helped others, and may be some things you want to think about. You may have other useful ideas for your situation and life experience.

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**Self-Direction**
Get in the driver’s seat for your care. Think about a new path for the future. Be open to new ideas about treatment. Develop a support network. Help plan your care.

**Individualized and Person-Centered**
Understand illness is only one piece of who you are. View yourself as a whole person with all the roles and things that make you, YOU! Share information about yourself with others who care for, and about you. Think about the change you want to make. Be open to new possibilities. Seek information about recovery.

**Empowerment**
Make choices and changes you want. Ask questions until you understand. Think about the change you want to make. Discover additional ways to make decisions. Learn about the resources at the VA and in your community.

**Holistic**
Pay attention to wellness in your mind, body, and spirit. Engage in healthy activities on a regular basis. Involve at least one special person in plans for your life. Volunteer to help others. Explore healthy ways to have fun and enjoy life.

**Non-Linear**
Understand all journeys have twists and turns. Your recovery journey will too. See a setback as a recovery step, not a failure. Share ideas for next steps with people who care about you. Think, “It’s important to keep trying.” Review and revise your care plan when needed. Learn a new coping skill from a friend and share it with another.
**Strengths-Based**
Recovery comes from your strengths. Recovery does not focus only on symptoms or problems. Ask, “What am I good at? What do I do well?” This will help you rediscover strengths. Participate in a variety of activities: art, music, sports and games, etc. Look for chances to learn new skills and meet new people. Share experiences, skills, and interests with others.

**Peer Support**
Connect with others who help or are interested in helping you. Search for support in the community. Listen with respect to other’s views. Understanding things from their point of view helps not only them but also you. Share your story with others. As you grow, think of how you can support others in their recovery.

**Respect**
You are the expert on yourself and situation. Your expertise is important in making treatment decisions. Ask for the information you need. Make personal needs known.

Talk about what works and does not work for you. Learn to express yourself in a way others can hear and understand you.

**Responsibility**
Take charge of your actions and decisions. Design an Individual Recovery Plan. Track symptoms and progress towards your goals. Ask for help when needed. Plan for times when you will be well and when you will need help. Eat a healthy diet. Exercise, sleep and have fun. Work with others who support you.

**Hope**
Keep a positive approach to life. Spend time with people who share your hope for yourself. Believe things will get better in your life. Focus on what you are able to do. Talk about successes and be open to new possibilities. Develop a plan to cope with stress. Recovery is possible when you reach your goals and set new ones. Find something to look forward to.

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**National Family Caregiver Month**
The Caregiver Support team is beginning to plan for National Family Caregiver Month. We need Caregivers help and input to make it a meaningful, yet fun month of support! If you would like to be a part of the planning group please contact us for more information.

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**OEF/OIF Caregiver Opportunity**
The Caregiver Council is in need of a member who is a provider of care to an OEF/OIF Veteran. There is no requirement for travel or to be in Iowa City for the monthly meetings. The representative may dial in from home or call in (with staff assist) from a CBOC. Feel free to contact one of the Caregiver Team members to answer questions about council membership or if you are interested.
VA’s Peer Support Mentoring Program links you to a peer – someone who has experienced similar challenges and situations – to provide you with additional support and guidance along your journey.

In addition to providing support, the Caregiver Peer Support Mentoring Program also helps Caregivers to establish relationships with each other and create a comfort zone for support.

Caregivers of Veterans of all eras are eligible to participate, both as mentors and as mentees. Mentors will be required to participate in training before being partnered with a mentee.

To get connected to the Caregiver Peer Support Mentoring Program, contact your local VA Caregiver Support Coordinators.

**Local Recovery Coordinator**
Stephanie Henrickson, MSN, RN
(319) 688-3359

Stephanie’s office is located at the Coralville Clinic. She facilitates and organizes Recovery programs for Veterans and their families. She also works to improve Recovery services and practice throughout the Iowa City Health Care System to ensure Veterans with psychosocial deficits are provided the opportunity to plan their own Recovery using VA and community resources.

**VA Crisis Line:** 1-800-273-8255, Press 1

**APPs FOR iOS AND ANDROID DEVICES**

**Mental health:**

-LifeArmor (iOS, & Android)
http://www.t2.health.mil/apps/lifearmor

**PTSD:**

-PTSD Coach (iOS, & Android)

**Mood, depression, and/or bipolar disorder:**

-T2 Mood Tracker (iOS, & Android)
http://www.t2.health.mil/apps/t2-mood-tracker

**Anxiety and stress:**

-Virtual Hope Box (iOS, & Android)
http://www.t2.health.mil/apps/virtual-hope-box

-Breathe2Relax (iOS, & Android)
http://www.t2.health.mil/apps/breathe2relax

-Tactical Breather (iOS, & Android)
http://www.t2.health.mil/apps/tactical-breather

**Mindfulness:**

-Mindfulness Coach (iOS only)

**Insomnia/sleep:**

-CBT-i Coach (iOS, & Android)