

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health
Administration
Iowa City
VA Health Care System

THE BEACON



A Spotlight On Your VA Health Care

Iowa City VA Health Care System's
Official Newsletter for Patients

UPCOMING EVENTS

JULY

- 01 • Smoke Free Campus Begins**
- 04 • Independence Day****
- 14 • U.S. Army Birthday**
- 19-20 • Veterans Experience Action Center**
St. Ambrose University
- 26 • Enrollment & Claims Clinic**
Waterloo VA Outpatient Clinic
945 Tower Park Drive, Waterloo, IA 50701

AUGUST

- 04 • U.S. Coast Guard Birthday**
- 12 • Veterans Parade**
Iowa State Fair
- 12 • Quad Cities Success Fair**
St. Ambrose University
- 15 • 1:00 pm Ribbon Cutting**
Dubuque Outpatient Clinic
2600 Dodge Street, Dubuque, IA
- 30 • Enrollment & Claims Clinic**
Cedar Rapids VA Outpatient Clinic
2230 Wiley Boulevard Southwest, Cedar Rapids, IA 52404

SEPTEMBER

- 02 • Labor Day****
- 8-13 • National Disabled Veterans
TEE Tournament**
Riverside, IA
- 16 • Mental Health Summit**
Coralville Public Library
1401 5th Street, Coralville, IA 52241
- 18 • U.S. Air Force Birthday**
- 27 • Enrollment & Claims Clinic**
Quad Cities VA Outpatient Clinic

Dear Veterans, Volunteers and Friends of VA,

As the nation's largest integrated health care system, VHA has a strong commitment to protecting and promoting the health and safety of patients, visitors, contractors, vendors, and volunteers.

The Surgeon General Reports of 2006, 2010, and 2014 concluded that cigarette smoking is the number one preventable cause of illness/disease and premature death worldwide. Studies have shown the harmful effects of smoking extend to co-workers and members of the public exposed to secondhand smoke. These reports indicate there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. There are also new studies that show risks to those exposed to thirdhand smoke.

Therefore, the Iowa City VA Health Care System (ICVAHCS) has transitioned to a

smoke-free campus as of July 1, 2019. This includes cigars, cigarettes, pipes and any other combustion of tobacco and non-Federal Drug Administration (FDA) approved electronic nicotine delivery system (ENDS), including but not limited to electronic or e-cigarettes, vape pens, or e-cigars.

While many Veterans we serve will not be affected by this policy, some Veterans will be affected. Veterans are invited to talk with their PACT provider about tobacco cessation options. The Iowa City VA Health Care System offers nicotine replacement therapy and other medications as well as support and counseling like tobacco cessation groups or the VA Smoking Quitline.

Our mission at the Iowa City VA Health Care System is to provide the quality care and services Veterans deserve. Please visit https://www.iowacity.va.gov/Smoke_Free/ for more information and resources.



Judith Johnson-Mekota
Director, Iowa City VA Health Care System



Judith Johnson-Mekota, FACHE

Director, Iowa City VA Health Care System

 @VALowacity

 www.iowacity.va.gov

» [To submit newsletter feedback, please click here.](#)



[Click here for tobacco cessation resources.](#)



Be Physically Active

Being physically active is an important step that you can take to improve your health. Some physical activity is better than none, and any amount of physical activity can improve health-related fitness.

Regular physical activity lowers the risk of depression, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, stroke, colon cancer, and breast cancer. It may also help you feel like you have more energy, stamina, and endurance. Be active for any and all reasons that are meaningful to you!

Physical activity is safe for almost everyone, and the health benefits of physical activity far outweigh the risks. Even if you are out of shape or have not been active in a long time, you can be active safely.

Physical activity is anything that gets the body moving. It can be moderate intensity, meaning you can talk while being active; or it can be vigorous intensity, meaning you cannot say more than a few words without taking a breath. Choose activities that you enjoy and start at a comfortable level. Once the



activity begins to seem easy, add a little more activity each time. Then try doing it more often.

For important health benefits, do at least 2½ hours each week of moderate-intensity, or 1¼ hours a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equal combination of both. Activity should be in episodes of at least 10 minutes, and it is best to spread these out during the week.

Do muscle strengthening activities at least twice each week and try to use all the major muscle groups in your body—the legs, hips, back, chest, abdomen, shoulders and arms. Stretching is also important and can improve flexibility, joint motion and circulation, and may relieve stress.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

If you have a concern about a health condition, talk with your health care team about the types and amounts of activity that are best for you. They can also help if you have questions about making a healthy living change.

» [Link to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#)

» [Link to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

Protect Yourself: Wear Sunscreen

Protecting the skin from the sun’s ultraviolet radiation is important for people of all ages and skin colors. Inadequate protection can lead to premature skin aging, skin cancers, and worsening of many skin conditions.

Sun damage adds up over time. Protecting the skin from the sun is not difficult:

- Seek shade when possible
- Avoid sun exposure between 10am-4pm
- Avoid surfaces that reflect sunlight
- Wear protective clothing (wide brimmed hat, UV-protective sunglasses)
- Sun protection on lips, eyelids and exposed skin

CHOOSE A SUNSCREEN THAT IS:

- **“Broad Spectrum”** (protects against UV-A and UV-B rays) containing titanium dioxide or zinc oxide. These do the best job of blocking UV rays and are not irritating skin.
- **SPF** (sun protection factor) of **30** or higher
- **Waterproof** (if swimming or sweating)
- **Not expired** (sunscreen may lose its effectiveness over time)

APPLY SUNSCREEN

- 20 – 30 minutes before going outside. Shake sunscreen and apply a handful (about 1 ounce) of sunscreen evenly to exposed skin. Don’t forget your ears, back, shoulders, back of knees and legs.
- Re-apply sunscreen every 2-3 hours when swimming, sweating, or have extended sun exposure - even if you are wearing protective clothing.

Open House & Baby Celebration

On the evening of May 15, 2019 the Women's Health Clinic hosted an open house and baby celebration for patients.

OPEN HOUSE

Women's Health Clinic staff met visitors, gave tours and answered questions about services available to meet the unique needs of women Veterans. Other departments in attendance included Eligibility & Enrollment, Breast Imaging, Community Care, Healthy Testing Kitchen, My HealthVet, Suicide Prevention, VBA, and Whole Health.

BABY CELEBRATION

During the open house, new and expecting parents were welcomed to a baby celebration. The Maternity Care Coordinator offered information about healthcare benefits and handed out donated baby supplies. Representatives from the UIHC Safety Store, the Iowa City Fire Department, and the Mom Mood Booster program provided information on baby and child safety.

Thank you to DAV Chapter 6 of Dubuque, the Iowa American Legion Auxiliary, Merit Construction, the Maquoketa Women's Club, and Sigma Nursing for their donations in support of this event.

Women Veterans are the fastest growing demographic of patients at VA.



The new Outpatient Clinic is located at 2600 Dodge Street, Dubuque, IA and is expected to open in mid-August.

New Dubuque Clinic Opening in August

In August 2019, the Dubuque VA Outpatient Clinic will be moving to a new location at 2600 Dodge Street. The new location, which was formerly a K-Mart store, will be nearly four times larger than the current Dubuque clinic. At approximately 21,000 square feet, the new facility will have space for expanded primary care and mental health clinics, including dedicated women's health exam rooms. It will also include a diagnostic lab, a Physical Therapy gym, Telehealth rooms, and Radiology (x-ray). There will be rooms available for specialty services to be added later if they are needed.

The current Dubuque VA Outpatient Clinic opened in 2001 and is co-located with Mercy Hospital in Dubuque. The 5,200 square foot clinic offers Primary Care, Mental Health, and a diagnostic lab, but has outgrown its space and has struggled to offer services to additional Veterans for the last few years.

The new location is expected to open in mid-August. Look for updated information about the grand opening online:

- » [Link to Iowa City VAHCS website](#)
- » [Link to Iowa City VAHCS Facebook](#)

VA Now Transplanting Hepatitis C Positive Kidneys



“At VA, we have the ability to quickly adopt medical advancements almost as soon as they are reported in medical literature. Providing high quality procedures, such as innovative organ transplants, illustrates the good stewardship of our resources and VA’s commitment to Veterans and the American people.”

Robert Wilkie, VA Secretary

The VA recently began offering a new option to patients awaiting kidney transplants: organs that are positive for hepatitis (hep) C.

In early March, a team from the ICVAHCS successfully transplanted hep C positive kidneys into four Veteran patients, then immediately began the treatment process to cure the viral infection that causes liver inflammation.

Dr. Daniel Katz, transplant surgery director for the ICVAHCS, said VA was quick to understand the bigger picture and the long-term, cost-savings potential of the new procedure.

“The high cost of hep C treatment may hinder rapid adoption of this practice in the private sector, where the transplant center may not be reimbursed for the hep C treatment,” Katz said. “Even with the hep C treatment, though, there will be cost savings over time by removing patients from dialysis.”

The ICVAHCS transplant team has successfully conducted more than 475 organ transplants and is on track to reach 500 in 2020.

The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is the most common bloodborne disease in the United States. VA has treated and cured more HCV patients than any other HCS in the country and is on track to eliminate the HCV in about a month in all Veterans willing and able to be treated. As of March 3, nearly 116,000 Veterans started all-oral hep C medications in VA, of which **96,654 Veterans completed treatment and have been cured.**

VA leads the country in hepatitis screening, testing, treatment, research and prevention.

» [Click here for more information](#)



NATIONAL DISABLED VETERANS TEE TOURNAMENT

A golf tournament for Veterans with varying disabilities.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

SEPTEMBER 8-13, 2019

IOWA CITY, IOWA

DAV® FULFILLING OUR PROMISES TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Telehealth Option Improves Outcomes for Patients with HIV

The VA leads the nation in telehealth, the use of secure video conferencing for medical visits. This technology provides an essential service to the rural areas served by the ICVAHCS. A study by the Iowa City VA's Center for Access and Delivery Research and Evaluation has found that use of telehealth by patients with HIV resulted in more frequent visits and better outcomes.

"The availability of telehealth programs was associated with small population-level improvements in documented viral suppression among all patients in service areas of telehealth clinics, and large improvements among program users," the study concluded.

Around 13% of eligible patients took advantage of the telehealth option for at least one HIV specialist appointment during the study. The study was based on procedures designed at the ICVAHCS, and the research was conducted at VA health care systems in Atlanta, Dallas, and Houston.

The ICVAHCS currently offers telehealth for dozens of clinics, including Primary Care, MOVE! Weight Management, Renal, Nutrition, and Mental Health.

Telehealth is offered to patients when it is available and medically appropriate. Patients interested in learning about telehealth should ask their health care provider if telehealth is an option for their needs.

» [Link to VIDEO 'Introduction to VA Telehealth Services'](#)



Another Day in Paradise for Cancer Survivors

For a few hours on June 2, 2019 the American Legion in Lone Tree, Iowa was transformed into a tropical paradise. Amidst the island music and colorful leis, Veterans living with a diagnosis of cancer joined together to celebrate and reflect on their stories. The first Sunday in June is National Cancer Survivors Day, and for several years the ICVAHCS has hosted a celebration for Veteran survivors and their families.

This year's event was themed "Another Day in Paradise" and featured a steel drum ensemble called Pandelirium, tropical decorations, and a lunch buffet. Whole Health Case Manager Natalie Goyette spoke about how Whole Health can enhance a Veteran's health during and following treatment. She shared services that can complement conventional health care, including battlefield acupuncture, yoga, Tai Chi, and nutritional recommendations.

An open mic session offered Veterans the opportunity to share their experience with

fellow survivors and partners in health care. The day provides an opportunity for survivors and their families to celebrate their milestones and validate their journeys, as well as acknowledge the family members and health care teams that supported them through their treatment.

This year's event was attended by over two hundred individuals and was made possible through the continued support of the Lone Tree American Legion, the Iowa City American Legion Women's Auxiliary, and dedicated staff and volunteers.



Judith Johnson-Mekota, Director of the Iowa City VA Health Care System, talks with a Veteran at the Cancer Survivors celebration in Lone Tree.

Apply for VA Health Care Benefits Today!

To apply for VA Health Care you must complete VA Form 10-10EZ. This can be completed:

- **By phone:** 1-877-222-VETS (1-877-222-8387)
 - **By mail**
 - **In-person:** at the nearest VA Medical Center or VA Clinic
- » [Online link to 'Apply for VA Health Care Benefits'](#)

NEED HELP?

For help filling out the application, an accredited representative, like a Veterans Service Officer (VSO), can help you fill out your claim.

- » [Link to 'Get Help Filing Your Claim or Appeal'](#)

Smoking Cessation Resources

VA TOBACCO CESSATION PROGRAM

Contact your primary care team or call (319) 688-3333.

VA SMOKING QUITLINE

1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838)

STATE QUITLINE

1-800-QUIT-NOW

The National Cancer Institute will connect to your state's tobacco quitline.

smokefreeVET

A free text messaging program to provide support, advice and encouragement. Text the word 'VET' to 47848. For Spanish, text VETesp to 47848.

[VA STAY QUIT COACH APP](#)

An App for Apple and Android smart-phones

Helps you in create a tailored plan that accounts for your reasons for quitting devices.

[SMOKEFREE VET](#)

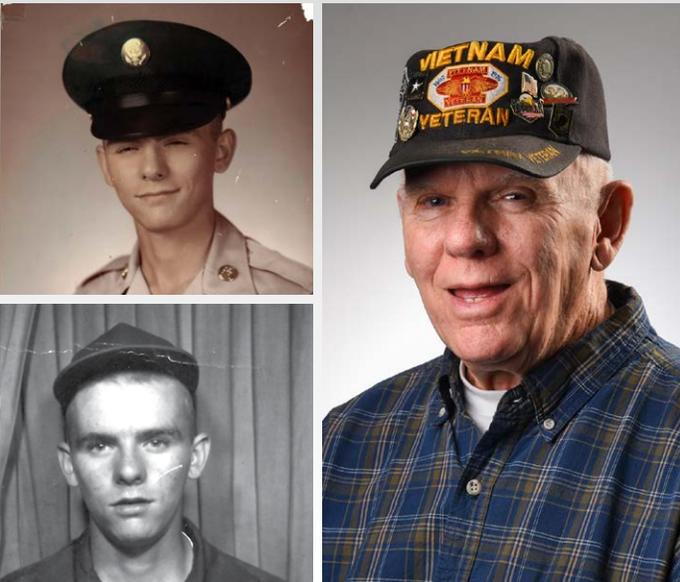
A free resource for those wishing to quit smoking or chewing tobacco.

[VA MENTAL HEALTH: TOBACCO AND HEALTH](#)

A collection of VA tobacco cessation materials and resources.

[VETERANS HEALTH LIBRARY](#)

The library provides easy-to-read health information that is available anywhere there is Internet access.



Choose VA Veterans Spotlight

Larry Axtell has been a patient at the Iowa City VA for 50 years in May, first visiting the facility in May of 1969 while on Active Duty. Larry served six years in the US Army, starting his journey in boot camp in Fort Leonard Wood, KS in 1966 and was honorably discharged in 1972.

Mr. Axtell chooses VA because of the excellent service he has experienced, and wants to thank the many care teams that have served him at the Iowa City VA and at the outpatient clinic in Bettendorf, IA over the years. He has been seen

in Podiatry, Dermatology, Pain Clinic, Urology, and many others and, "They treat you like royalty – I have never had a problem. Everyone treats you so well."

In his spare time, Mr. Axtell volunteers in his community, serving on DAV fundraisers and is currently the Vice Senior Commander for the AmVets in Davenport, IA, among many other community service projects.

- » [Want to be in the next 'Choose VA Veterans Spotlight'?](#)