



# VETERANS' health *matters*

VOLUME 3, 2010



## VA CARES FOR WOMEN VETERANS

“This is not your grandfather’s VA,” pledges a new video aimed at encouraging female Veterans to enroll in VA services, and it appears that women are listening.

Female Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Veterans are enrolling in VA health care at a much higher rate than female Veterans from past eras. Almost 50 percent of OIF/OEF female Veterans have signed up for VA services.

Currently, 7.7 percent of VA health care users are women Veterans. This figure is projected to double by 2033.

VA Secretary Erik K. Shinseki, recently made it known that VA is not currently prepared for the increasing numbers of female Veterans. He has requested \$217 million in gender-specific programs for the next fiscal year (a 21% increase from 2009), with plans to improve care and provide more privacy and security for female Veterans.

*Cont. on page 6*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

VA National News • 2 | VA Facility Highlights • 4 | VA Cares for Women Veterans • 6  
VISN 21’s Women Veterans Program Managers • 7 | Where to Find Us • 8

## VA Announces Test of Paperless Claims Processing System

Initiative Will Improve Process and Speed Payments to Veterans

WASHINGTON –The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has selected its regional benefits office in Providence, R.I., to test a paperless system and new procedures to improve processing of Veterans' claims for disability compensation.

“This test program marks a major milestone in VA’s move to paperless processing,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “It supports VA’s transformation of the claims process to ensure speedy delivery of benefits to Veterans, their families and their survivors.”

The pilot, which initially focuses on compensation benefits, is expected to start at the Providence facility in November, with completion in May 2011. Additional pilots are expected before the new claims system is deployed to all 57 VA regional benefits offices.

Secretary Shinseki has set a goal that by 2015 VA will process all claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy.

## VA Makes Applying for Health Care Benefits Faster for Veterans

Elimination of Online Signature Requirement Speeds Access to Care

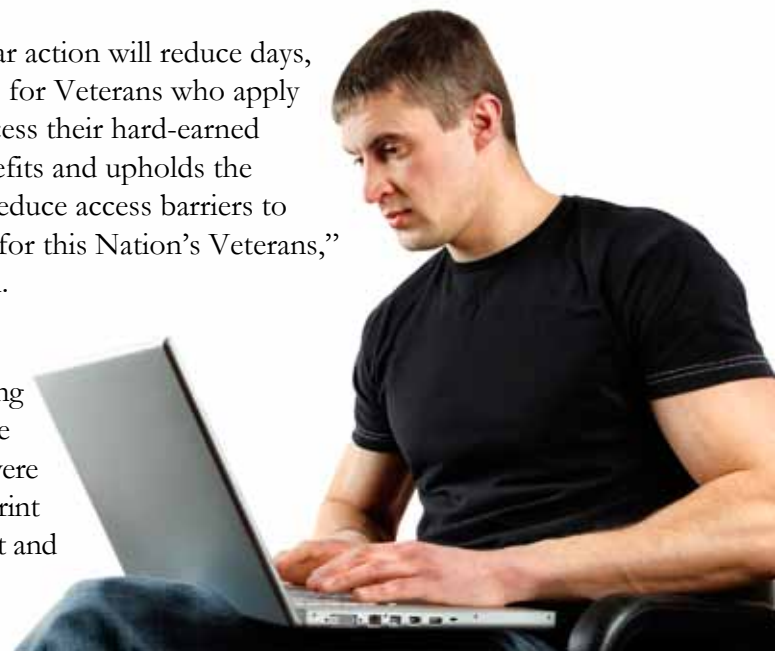
WASHINGTON – As part of VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki’s effort to streamline access to benefits, VA has removed the signature requirement for Veterans who electronically submit an online 10-10EZ “Application for Health Benefits.”

“This singular action will reduce days, if not weeks, for Veterans who apply online to access their hard-earned medical benefits and upholds the promise to reduce access barriers to needed care for this Nation’s Veterans,” said Shinseki.

Previously, Veterans filling out the online application were required to print a copy, sign it and send to their local medical center or

wait for a copy to be mailed to them for signature and mailing before enrollment into the VA healthcare system could occur.

For additional information, go to [www.va.gov/healtheligibility](http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility) or call VA’s toll free number at 1-877-222-VEITS (8387). The online form is available at [www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez](http://www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez).



### Learn more about VA – become a Facebook fan!

Central California Health Care System  
[www.facebook.com/VAFresno](http://www.facebook.com/VAFresno)

San Francisco VA Medical Center - [www.facebook.com/sfvamc](http://www.facebook.com/sfvamc)

VA Northern California Health Care System  
[www.facebook.com/VANCHCS](http://www.facebook.com/VANCHCS)

VA Palo Alto Health Care System - [www.facebook.com/vapahcs](http://www.facebook.com/vapahcs)

## VA Simplifies Access to Health Care and Benefits for Veterans with PTSD



WASHINGTON – VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki announced a critical step forward in providing an easier process for Veterans seeking health care and disability compensation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with the publication of a final regulation in the Federal Register.

“This nation has a solemn obligation to the men and women who have honorably served this country and suffer from the often devastating emotional wounds of war,” said Secretary Shinseki. “This final regulation goes a long way to ensure that Veterans receive the benefits and services they need.”

By publishing a final regulation in the Federal Register – to simplify the process for a Veteran to claim service connection for PTSD – VA reduces the evidence needed if the trauma claimed by a Veteran is related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity and is consistent with the places, types, and circumstances of the Veteran’s service.

This science-based regulation relies on evidence that concluded that a Veteran’s deployment to a war zone is linked to an increased risk of PTSD.

Under the new rule, VA would not require corroboration of a stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity if a VA doctor confirms that the stressful experience recalled by a Veteran adequately supports a diagnosis of PTSD and the Veteran’s symptoms are related to the claimed stressor.

## VA APPROVES \$2.8M FOR GULF WAR ILLNESS RESEARCH

WASHINGTON – VA has approved \$2.8 million to fund three new research projects that focus on testing or developing new treatments for illnesses affecting Veterans who served in the Gulf War 1990-1991. The research incorporates recommendations of the department’s Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses Task Force.

“Reaching out to Gulf War Veterans is essential to the transformation of VA,” said Veterans Affairs Chief of Staff John R. Gingrich. “This research is a great opportunity to do something that will improve the care and services these Veterans have earned.”

About 697,000 men and women served in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm from August 1990 to June 1991 during the Gulf War. In the years since they returned, nearly a quarter of these Veterans have experienced chronic symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, gastrointestinal problems, cognitive dysfunction, sleep disturbances, persistent headaches, skin rashes, respiratory conditions and mood changes. The symptoms are known collectively as “Gulf War Veterans’ illnesses.”

# VA FACILITY HIGHLIGHTS

## SAN FRANCISCO VA MEDICAL CENTER



After over five years of planning and construction, the San Francisco VA Medical Center officially opened its new Emergency Department (ED). The new ED has 12 individual self-enclosed exam rooms. All rooms are privacy protected and have negative pressure capability. In addition to benefitting emergency and urgent walk-in Veterans, there is increased space to take care of psychiatric emergencies 24 hours a day. The project also added two floors above the ED for administrative space and increased space for Dental, Radiology, and Medical Practice. “We are excited to finally be opening the new Emergency Department,” said San Francisco VA Medical Center Director Lawrence H. Carroll. “It’s been a long time coming, but we now have a new, state-of-the-art ED that we can be proud of and that our Veterans deserve.”

## PACIFIC ISLANDS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (PIHCS) has hired a second Patient Advocate to provide needed access and services for our ever increasing number of registered Veterans seeking VA health care. Ms. Sophie Parazo and Mr. Schoen Safotu assist our Veterans when they are angry, confused or need help. Their efforts and teamwork with PIHCS staff provide care, as well as compassion to our Veterans, as evidenced by this story.

PIHCS Palliative Care Coordinator Joan Foley was working with two Samoan Veterans. One was at the PIHCS Community Living Center. The other lived in a Honolulu hotel and was waiting to find out about his disability rating for his medical benefits so he could be placed in a convalescent home.

Ms. Foley asked Schoen Safotu to visit the Samoan Veteran at the Community Living Center, because he did not have company. Mr. Safotu found out that he was in the U.S. Marine Corps and had served in Korea. He then asked if he knew another Samoan Veteran who he knew to be a Marine who also served in Korea. To his surprise, the response was that he was his older brother! They hadn’t seen each other for almost 60 years! The brothers did not have the same last name, because one was raised by an aunt and uncle after birth and took their last name.

*Cont. on page 7*

## CENTRAL CALIFORNIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

In an effort to assist Veterans arriving for appointments and promote great care, new curbside service from VA staff helps Veterans at the main entrance. Veterans are delighted! Working together, both paid employees, work-study students and volunteers comprise a team being



referred to as “Chad and the Red Wave.” Employee and Army Veteran Chad Kangas, dressed in a white polo shirt and his volunteer staff (in red polo shirts) meet each vehicle as it pulls to the curb, offering a welcome and escort service to the door. For Veterans in wheelchairs, the team members assist by operating the newly installed wheelchair lift or offering to push them up the ramp. This service allows a greater level of comfort and safety for Veterans and their families coming to VA Central California.

## **PALO ALTO HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

### **Palo Alto VA Reaches Out to Women Veterans**

VA Palo Alto Women's Health Center, led by Dr. Samina Iqbal, has been designated as a Center of Excellence and is a VISN 21 women's clinic that is leading the way toward the "best care anywhere" for women Veterans.



In addition to providing comprehensive primary care services, the Palo Alto Women's Health Center offers patient-centered services, such as reproductive care, comprehensive breast care, services tailored to unique needs of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, complementary medicine, women's health psychology, and specialty clinics like musculoskeletal, physical therapy, endocrinology, and rheumatology.

The newest addition to the Women's Health Center is Dr. Elizabeth Manning, a psychologist specializing in the treatment of mental health issues specific to women. She augments the mental health care provided to women Veterans at the Women's Outreach Prevention and Education Center and the Women's Trauma Recovery Program, which was the first all-women's mental health residential treatment center in VA.

## **SIERRA NEVADA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

In October 2009, the new women's clinic opened in the newly renovated primary care clinic at the Reno campus of VASNHCS. It has a full-time gynecologist, Dr. Carmela Cipollina. The clinic offers a new approach. It provides gynecology services in the primary care clinic. Doing this has improved access for women Veterans to immediate GYN care. There are same day access appointments, every day, to the specialty gynecologist. This has improved patient compliance with all performance measures related to women's health. This has also lead to improved communication for all health measures for women Veterans, as Dr. Cipollina now has daily access to all primary care providers. This team approach exemplifies the principles of the patient-centered model of care. With a fully integrated gynecology clinic, the primary care team, including nurses, MSAs, pharmacists, and mental health providers, can now also provide excellent gender-specific care for women Veterans.

The new women's clinic has a small private waiting room and two fully equipped exam rooms with adaptable examination tables. The full time gynecologist, Dr. Cipollina, can also perform colposcopies, biopsies, endometrial sampling, cryotherapy, and contraceptive insertion, as well as routine annual cervical and breast exams.

## **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

The VA NCHCS is looking forward to building a new Women's Health Clinic at the Sacramento VA Medical Center in 2012. The clinic will be located between the current Primary Care Clinic and the Epiphany Coffee Shop area.

Women Veterans and the clinic staff are excited to have more space for their services. "This is a wonderful opportunity to serve our women Veterans in a new facility that meets their comprehensive health care needs," said Dr. Esther Hui, Director of Women's Health. Services include routine health care for chronic problems such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity, as well as routine breast and gynecological exams. Social work, mental health, and various specialties, such as gynecology and breast surgery will be offered.

Please check out our facility and program updates on our Web site ([www.northerncalifornia.va.gov](http://www.northerncalifornia.va.gov)). Come visit us sometime.

Stay tuned for more information on the upcoming ground breaking event of the new clinic at NCHCS.

# VA CARES FOR WOMEN VETERANS

(Cont. from page 1)

In the past, VA women's care was somewhat fragmented. Today, VA women's health centers promote sensitivity toward female Veterans and provide comprehensive care. This includes well-coordinated primary care services in women-only settings, preventive services, treatment for acute and chronic illnesses, and co-located mental health services.

To help facilitate coordination of comprehensive care, VA women's health centers are mandated to have Women Veterans Program Managers (see the contact information for VISN 21's Women Program Managers on page 7). Only primary care providers designated as interested, proficient, and competent in women's health provide services to female Veterans.

These providers regularly attend continuing education seminars that give up-to-date information relevant to women's health issues.

## RECENT EFFORTS OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO WOMEN INCLUDE:

**Improved Access to Family Counseling** – VA and Vet Centers recognize that family members are central to the combat Veteran's readjustment. To meet the need for qualified family counselors, VA Readjustment Counseling Service has developed qualifying criteria for family counselors in Vet Centers. The Vet Center program plans to place at least one qualified, specialized family counselor in every Vet Center nationwide. The VA Palo Alto Health Care System already has family counseling.

Stress can have a negative affect on both mental and physical health. It can be so overwhelming that talking with a professional is needed. The VA Women Veterans Program Manager can help women Veterans access VA services and programs to help deal with stress and its health impacts.

**Enhanced Access to Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Counseling** – To increase the program's capacity to provide MST counseling, a qualified MST counselor is planned for every Vet Center. During the interim, Vet Centers currently without a qualified MST counselor will minimally have the capacity to assess and refer MST Veterans.

WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Before you reach the breaking point...

Learn how to manage stress.  
Let VA help.

★ You served, you deserve the best care anywhere. ★

Department of Veterans Affairs

www.va.gov/womenhealthcare

WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Don't let pain control your life.

LET VA HELP.

★ You served, you deserve the best care anywhere. ★

Department of Veterans Affairs

www.va.gov/womenhealthcare

## VISN 21's Women Veterans Program Managers

### San Francisco VAMC

Cheryl Wenell  
(415) 221-4810 x3956  
cheryl.wenell@va.gov

### VA Palo Alto HCS

Linda Kleinsasser  
(650) 493-5000 x 64851  
linda.kleinsasser@va.gov

### VA Sierra Nevada HCS (Reno)

Zola Ferguson  
(775) 328-1767  
zola.ferguson@va.gov

### VA Central California HCS (Fresno)

Kelli Johnston  
(559) 225-6100 ext 5447  
kelli.johnston@va.gov

### VA Pacific Island HCS

Dr. Barbara Fenton  
(808) 433-7850  
barbara.fenton@va.gov

### VA Northern California HCS (Sacramento)

Julie LaGuardia  
(925) 372-2494  
Julie.laguardia@va.gov



## State Women Veterans Coordinators

### CALIFORNIA

Barbara Ward  
*Women Veterans Coordinator*  
*Deputy Secretary, California*  
*Department of Veterans Affairs*  
1227 O Street, Ste. 300  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Tel. (916) 653-2327  
FAX (916) 651-6262  
E-mail: barbara.ward@cdva.ca.gov

### NEVADA

Carole Turner  
*Women Veterans Coordinator*  
*Deputy Executive Director, Nevada*  
*Office of Veterans Affairs*  
950 W. Owens, Rm. 111  
Las Vegas, NV 89106

Tel. (702) 636-3070  
FAX (702) 486-3258  
E-mail: turnerc@veterans.nv.gov



## PACIFIC ISLANDS

*(Cont. from page 4)*

Both brothers were wounded at the same time in Korea and woke up on the hospital ship USS Hope. When the ship reached shore, the brothers were separated. The older brother was also wounded in Vietnam.



Mr. Safotu immediately jumped into action. With the help of his family, he quickly arranged for the brothers to reunite at the PIHCS Community Living Center. The reunion was very emotional for everyone. The older brother was recovering from a serious stroke and could not talk, but that night he held his brother's hand and clearly yelled out his name. They spent months catching up.

Sadly, and just recently, the younger brother passed away. That he got to reunite with his older brother is truly a remarkable story! Teamwork and compassionate care from PIHCS made this happen.

Kerri Childress, Editor  
VISN 21  
3801 Miranda Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1290  
kerri.childress@va.gov

PRESORTED  
STANDARD  
POSTAGE & FEES  
PAID  
DEPT. OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS  
PERMIT NO. G-75

## Where to find us! \* OPC = Outpatient Clinic

### VA Central California Health Care System

#### VA Central California Health Care System

2615 E. Clinton Avenue  
Fresno, CA 93703-2286  
(559) 225-6100

#### VA South Valley OPC

1050 North Cherry Street  
Tulare, CA 93274  
(559) 684-8703

#### NEW Merced OPC

340 E. Yosemite Avenue  
Merced, CA 95340  
(209) 381-0105

### VA Northern California Health Care System

#### VA Sacramento Medical Center

10535 Hospital Way  
Mather, CA 95655  
(916) 843-7000

#### VA Martinez OPC

150 Muir Road  
Martinez, CA 94553  
(953) 372-2000

#### VA Redding OPC

351 Hartnell Avenue  
Redding, CA 95926  
(530) 226-7555

#### VA McClellan OPC

5342 Dudley Blvd.  
McClellan Park, CA 95652-1074  
(916) 561-7400

#### VA Mare Island OPC

201 Walnut Ave.  
Mare Island, CA 94592  
(707) 562-8200

#### Oakland Behavioral Health Clinic

525 21st Street  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 587-3400

#### VA Oakland OPC

2221 Martin Luther King Jr. Way  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 267-7800

#### VA Fairfield OPC

103 Bodin Circle, BLDG. 778  
Travis AFB, CA 94535  
(707) 437-1800

### VA Chico OPC

280 Cohasset Road  
Chico, CA 95926  
(530) 879-5000

#### NEW VA Yreka Rural Clinic

101 E. Oberlin Road  
Yreka, CA 96097  
(530) 841-8500

#### NEW Yuba City Outreach Clinic

1231 Plumas Street  
Yuba City, CA 95991  
(530) 751-8455

### VA Palo Alto Health Care System

**VA Palo Alto Division**  
3801 Miranda Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1290  
(650) 493-5000

#### VA Menlo Park Division

795 Willow Road  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
(650) 493-5000

#### VA Livermore Division

4951 Arroyo Road  
Livermore, CA 94550  
(935) 373-4700

#### VA Capitola OPC

1350 N. 41st Street Suite 102  
Capitola, CA 95010  
(831) 464-5519

#### VA Stockton OPC

500 W Hospital Road  
Stockton, CA 95231  
(209) 946-3400

#### VA Modesto OPC

1524 McHenry Ave. Suite 315  
Modesto, CA 95350  
(209) 557-6200

#### VA Monterey OPC

3401 Engineer Lane  
Seaside, CA 93955  
(831) 883-3800

#### VA San Jose OPC

80 Great Oaks Boulevard  
San Jose, CA 95119  
(408) 363-3011

#### VA Sonora OPC

13663 Mono Way  
Sonora, CA 95370  
(209) 588-2600

#### NEW VA Fremont OPC

39199 Liberty Street  
Fremont, CA 94538  
(510) 791-4001

### San Francisco VA Medical Center

4150 Clement Street  
San Francisco, CA 94121-1598  
(415) 221-4810

#### Downtown S.F. VA OPC

401 3rd Street  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
(415) 281-5100

#### VA Eureka OPC

714 F Street  
Eureka, CA 95501  
(707) 442-5335

#### VA San Bruno OPC

1001 Sneath Lane  
San Bruno, CA 94006  
(650) 615-6000

#### VA Santa Rosa OPC

3841 Brickway Blvd.  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403  
(707) 569-2300

#### VA Ukiah OPC

630 Kings Court  
Ukiah, CA 95482  
(707) 468-7700

### VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System

#### Ioannis A. Lougaris VA Medical Center

1000 Locust Street  
Reno, NV 89502-2597  
(775) 786-7200

#### VA Lahontan Valley OPC

345 West A Street  
Fallon, NV 89406  
(775) 428-6161

#### VA Sierra Foothills OPC

11985 Heritage Oak Place  
Suite #1  
Auburn, CA 95603  
(530) 889-0872

#### VA Carson Valley OPC

925 Ironwood Drive, Suite 2102  
Minden, NV 89423  
(775) 786-7200 Ext. 4000

#### NEW VA Diamond View OPC

110 Bella Way  
Susanville, CA 96130  
(530) 251-4550

#### NEW Winnemucca Rural Outreach Clinic

Army 735 4th Street  
Winnemucca, NV 89445  
(877) 320-4990

### VA Pacific Islands Health Care System

#### Spark M. Matsunaga VA Medical Center

459 Patterson Road  
Honolulu, HI 96819  
(808) 433-0600

#### VA PTSD Residential Rehabilitation Program

459 Patterson Road  
Honolulu, HI 96819  
(808) 433-0004

#### VA Maui OPC

203 Ho'ohanna Street, Suite 303  
Kahului, HI 96732  
(808) 871-2454

#### VA Hilo OPC

1285 Waiuanue Ave., Suite 211  
Hilo, HI 96720  
(808) 935-3781

#### VA Kona OPC

75-377 Hualalai Road  
Kailua-Kona, HI 96740  
(808) 329-0774

#### VA Kauai OPC

3-3367 Kuhio Hwy., Suite 200  
Lihue, HI 96766  
(808) 246-0497

#### VA Guam OPC

US Naval Hospital  
Wing E-200 Box 7608  
Agana Heights, GU 96919  
(671) 472-7250

#### VA American Samoa OPC

Fitele Teo Army Reserve Building  
Pago Pago, American Samoa  
96799  
(684) 699-3730

#### NEW VA Lanai Outreach Clinic

628-B Seventh Street  
Lanai City, HI 96763  
(808) 565-6423

#### NEW VA Saipan OPC

Marina Heights Business Park  
P.O. Box 500938  
Saipan, MP 96950  
(670) 323-9000

#### VA Regional Office & Outpatient Center Manila

Veterans Affairs  
PSC 501  
FPO, AP 96515-1100  
(011) 632-523-6300