

VETERANS'

healthy living



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In recognition of completing the tough ruck 26.2, the Boston Athletic Association extends its congratulations.

April 19, 2014

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**Going Green
in a BIG Way**

**Improving
Access to Care**



**VA
HEALTH
CARE**

Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century



Dear Veterans

A Message from the Network Director



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On the Cover:

"Tough Ruck" marathon participants show off their completion certificates at the Lexington and Concord Revolutionary War Battlefield in Boston, MA on Patriot's Day – April 19, 2014.



For many, the summer season means going on vacation or relaxing with friends and family. The Network employees and I like doing those things, too. But first, we want to tell you about some exciting programs in VISN 1.

On page 3, we included an overview of the Rules Based Processing System (RBPS), which allows Veterans to add or change family member status through eBenefits quickly—generally in a matter of days. The idea for this tool came from a VA employee who wanted to make it easier for Veterans to make simple coverage changes.

We've been making other kinds of changes in VISN 1 that we think will have a lasting effect. On page 4, you can read about some of the award winning ways that VISN 1 is "going green" and the impact it is having at our facilities.

Page 5 details some of the ways we now deliver health care to make it more accessible for Veterans. Examples include the popular "Patient Aligned Care Team" (PACT) concept, extended facility hours, and Telehealth.

On page 6, we look at how VISN 1 has responded to President Obama's challenge of ending Veteran homelessness and learn why interpreting the numbers can be tricky.

Finally, we want to share some of the efforts of our dedicated outreach team members, whose goal is to find and enroll Veterans in VA health care. On page 7, you can read about a few of the hundreds of events that they are involved in each year.

Have a safe and happy summer, and thank you for your service. Now let us serve you!

Michael F. Mayo-Smith, M.D., M.P.H.
Network Director

Going Green in a BIG Way

Recycling newspaper, grass clippings, or aluminum and glass containers at home are great steps toward helping our planet's sustainability. So imagine the impact of adopting green initiatives on a much larger scale, such as throughout VISN 1 facilities.

Bill Kulas, VISN 1 Environmental Program Manager, says the VISN is making big strides toward meeting—indeed, exceeding—goals set for green initiatives.

The VISN encompasses 11 facilities, nearly 14,000 employees, and about 10 million square feet of space. Kulas says that accounts for a lot of waste. “Our solid waste recycling rates were at 10 percent in 2005, and we’re now at about 45 percent.”

“The Federal Green Challenge challenges federal agencies to

lead by example in reducing the federal government’s environmental impact. In 2013, Manchester Medical Center won the Region 1 Innovation Award, but we’re doing great things in many areas.”

For example, rain gardens have been established at four facilities to manage storm water in an environmentally safe manner. “These gardens harvest storm water that would otherwise go into public drains, potentially adding to erosion,” Kulas says. “But the gardens also provide a place of healing and reflection for patients, and they provide meaningful work skills to our Veteran population.”

Three facilities in the VISN now have pervious pavement as part of the green initiatives. Pervious pavement allows water to permeate through it,

which reduces standing water and runoff, and ultimately reduces ice buildup.

The VISN is now planning and building combined heat/power plant units that burn natural gas to generate electricity, a process that also generates heat for facilities.

Kulas says management has been a huge factor in moving the green efforts forward. “Leaders put systems in place to get the word out to people, and they developed goals and measurement tools to see how we’re progressing. Their communication and level of involvement was critical—making sure people knew their participation made an impact.”

Significant waste stream amounts recycled for fiscal year 2013 included:

- 547 tons of cardboard
- 220 tons of comingled glass, plastic, and paper
- 124 tons of landscaping materials
- 365 tons of metals
- 850+ tons of paper
- 402 tons of wood
- 4.3 tons of reusable biomedical waste containers
- 8 tons of batteries
- 182 tons of waste oil
- 3.5 tons of printer cartridges



Rain garden at Brockton VA Medical Center in Boston, MA.

Homeless Veteran Numbers: When UP Means DOWN

In 2009, President Barack Obama and former VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki announced the goal of ending Veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. How are we doing?

When you hear that the number of homeless Veterans has decreased, you might think that is good news. Kevin Casey, Network Homeless Coordinator, says that's only partially true.

“VISN 1 showed 169 unsheltered Veterans at the end of fiscal year 2013. That sounds like an improvement compared to 223 Veterans in 2007. While we've made a great deal of headway, the numbers can be confusing because we're actually doing more than ever to find homeless Veterans or those at risk of homelessness, which can make the numbers go up.”

Perhaps a better way to look at it, suggests Casey, is to consider the number of Veterans taken off the street. “Rather than counting the number still out there,” he says, “we look at the number we've housed, prevented from becoming homeless, or intervened with in some way. For example, in New England, we have 2,942 HUD-VASH vouchers right now. Of those, 2,622 are issued—meaning the voucher has helped that many otherwise homeless Veterans.”

Some funding for homeless initiatives is based on the projected number of homeless Veterans, but accurately counting homeless Veterans—particularly during winter in New England—can be a challenge. Most seek respite indoors during winter, and those who can will flee to warmer locales. Also, trying to locate homeless Veterans in rural environments can be difficult. Thus, the count is not the most accurate assessment of the number of homeless, and it does not truly represent the progress VA has made in sheltering Veterans.

For Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless,

VA IS HERE TO HELP.

Jim, formerly homeless Veteran
Served 2004-2011

Help for Homeless Veterans
877-4AID-VET
va.gov/homeless | (877) 424-3838

Still, Casey believes VA has made significant improvements nationwide at improving homelessness since 2009. “By 2015,” he says, “we will have made an impact because we've established some best practices, and we've learned how to rapidly house Veterans through Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF).” SSVF helps prevent at-risk Veterans from becoming homeless and rapidly re-houses those just evicted by providing eligible Veterans families case management services and assistance to obtain VA and other benefits—like childcare, legal, financial planning, and transportation, among others. Nationally, nearly 90 percent of those discharged from SSVF have found permanent housing.

In VISN1, some funds are used for “safe haven” beds reserved for Veterans with a history of substance abuse. Casey says these beds are important because it provides a place for Veterans who aren't sober.

If you or someone you know needs more information about homeless Veteran programs, please contact 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838) or go to <http://www.va.gov/homeless/>.

