

# Veteran Updates

News and Updates on Veteran's Issues from the Durham VA Health Care System • June 2018

## VA Announces Whole Health Flagship Sites

### Putting Veterans in Control of Their Health Care

The VA's Whole Health System provides a pathway for Veterans, their families and VA staff to work together as Veterans create personal health plans that include well-being and clinical treatments. These plans consider the values and needs of individual Veterans, putting an even greater emphasis on listening to patients.

"By developing a personal health plan that integrates many areas of their lives, Veterans can truly take charge of their well-being and improve their health all around. I'm pleased to recognize these VA facilities that are helping our Veterans do just that," said VA Secretary nominee Robert Wilkie. "VA's Whole Health approach helps Veterans live their lives to the fullest."

The Durham VA Health Care System is a Whole Health design site and began offering classes to Veterans on June 11, 2018.

When Veterans start on the whole health pathway they are not alone. VA staff and Veteran peers guide and support Veterans

throughout this journey.

Durham VA Peer Support Specialist Irettha Alston recently attended a variety of training to learn how to empower Veterans to take control of their own self-care via the Whole Health program.

"The implementation of the program will change the way we do health care here," said Alston.

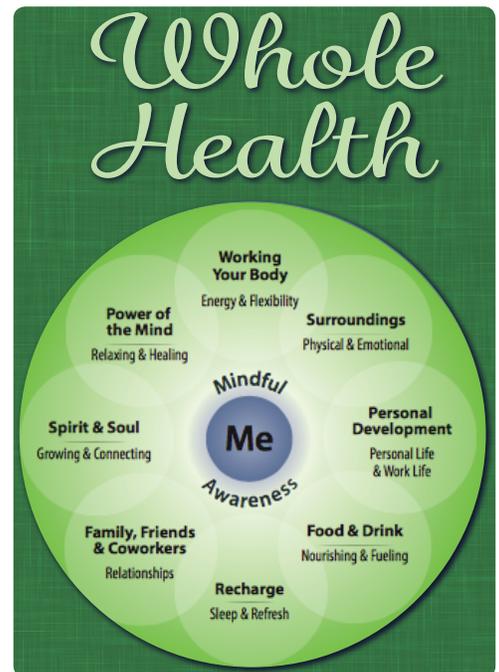
Whole Health helps Veterans to see their own mission for life and health. Veterans attend groups where they are learning skills to improve their overall health and wellbeing; learning how to improve all areas of self-care.

As the VA shifts from a health-care system focused primarily on treating disease to one guided by a personalized health plan that considers the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and environmental needs of Veterans, the Whole Health System acknowledges that health care involves more than the physical body.

Veterans engaging in the whole health approach have reported feeling more in

control of their care and expressed greater satisfaction in how they communicate with their providers.

For more information visit <https://www.va.gov/patientcenteredcare>.



## Male? Over 45? Read This Now!

For men hitting middle-age one of the major health concerns is problems with the prostate. The prostate is a gland and is one of the many organs that make up the male reproductive system. According to cancer.gov, prostate cancer is the most common cancer and the second leading cause of cancer deaths among men in the U.S.



"We recommend that most male Veterans start regular prostate screening around age 55," explains Dr. Jeff Gingrich, Chief of Urology at the Durham VA Health Care

System. "Once every two years is adequate. However, those with increased risks such a family history of prostate cancer, African-Americans and those who've been exposed to herbicides during service should consider increasing their screening schedule."

These screenings are important, as prostate cancer is incredibly difficult to detect. Problems like more frequent urination don't necessarily mean that one has cancer; the prostate enlarges as men get older. The screening

is relatively simple, and usually done by a Veteran's Primary Care physician. Some 95 percent of men who receive a prostate cancer diagnosis are in the initial stages of the disease.

"Historically, only about the 3 percent of those diagnosed with prostate cancer actually die from it," said Dr. Gingrich. "Getting regular screenings helps keep out of that percentile."

If you are concerned about prostate cancer, please contact your provider for a screening, or visit <https://www.cancer.gov/types/prostate>.

### Future Town Halls:

- **Durham VAMC**..... Tuesday, October 23..... 4:30 – 6:30 pm
- **Greenville Health Care Center** ..... Wednesday, December 5.....3:00 - 5:00 pm

## #BeThere in the Fight Against Suicide

As rewarding as military service can be, it has its own unique difficulties. Constant deployments put strains on families, the physical nature of the job can lead to injuries that can last a lifetime, and few Veterans experience the potential horrors of combat. Besides the obvious physical trauma that results from combat service, there are scars that are not seen, those deep psychological wounds that are arguably the most difficult to heal.

According to a 2014 VA study, those psychological wounds kill a troubling number of Veterans. Of the 41,425 adult suicides in the U.S. in 2014, some 18 percent were Veterans. If we further dissect those statistics, some 65 percent of those Veteran suicides were Veterans over age 50. These are troubling numbers indeed.

Those who commit suicide often do so alone. They feel disconnected, isolated and lost in a world that doesn't really seem to care if they live or die.

### One suicide is too many.

Turning the tide against Veteran suicide may seem daunting, but the remedies are often simpler than we think. Something as simple as a phone call, an invitation to coffee or a social event can literally save someone who is in crisis from making life's most irrevocable decision. If life is a battlefield, suicide is the ultimate enemy, but it can be defeated. All we must do is be there.

If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide please call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 or visit <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>.



## DVAHCS Shows PRIDE for LGBT+ Veterans

For the second year in a row, the Durham VA Healthcare System (DVAHCS) will show its support for our LGBT+ Veterans. June PRIDE highlights the special needs of LGBT+ Veterans, and the DVAHCS' commitment to provide them the same high quality of care that our Veteran patient population has come to expect.

Years of stigma and misunderstanding has left our LGBT+ Veterans with complex healthcare needs. For many, staying "in the closet" was a career necessity. Still others received punitive discharges at a time when being openly gay or lesbian in the military was forbidden. And there is still considerable misunderstanding on what it means to be "transgendered."

"Our program for LGBT+ Veterans has grown in the past two years," says Jennifer Serio, DVAHCS' LGBT+ Veteran Care Coordinator. "We have a bi-weekly wellness group for LGBT+ Veterans and a workgroup comprised of LGBT+ Veterans to help build the relationship between our staff and our LGBT+ patients. June PRIDE is a month-long celebration featuring programs and events specifically tailored to our LGBT+ Veterans and their supporters."

What is so unique about the DVAHCS LGBT+ program is that it is a Veteran driven initiative. As the DVAHCS moves a Whole Health structure of care, taking someone's sexual and gender identity into account isn't simply prudent, it's essential. If an LGBT+ Veteran can't comfortably

### LGBT+ Pride Month Events:

- **June 20—Wednesday from 12:30PM - 2:00PM** VA Chapel, 3rd Floor, room C3014 Presentation: "Spirituality & the LGBT+ Community"
- **June 23—Saturday, 11:00AM - Noon.** Join us for our NEW monthly LGBT+ Veteran Networking Meeting held on every 3rd Saturday of the month the LGBT+ Veteran Networking Meeting is located in the Director's Conference room, 1st floor, room A1010 on VAMC main campus

discuss their sexual and gender identity with their providers, we may have failed them and, by extension, the rest of our Veteran patients. Considering the misunderstandings of the LGBT+ population in the past, two wrongs do not a right make.

"Our LGBT+ Veteran population is incredibly resilient and strong," explains Serio. "The past few years haven't been a comfortable ride for them. I'm passionate about our LGBT+ Veteran community. Like all of our Veterans, they've given so much to us and it's time we recognized their contributions to our nation."

If you or someone you know is an LGBT+ Veteran and have questions about the DVAHCS LGBT+ program please contact Jennifer Serio, LGBT+ Veteran Care Coordinator at [Jennifer.Serio@va.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Serio@va.gov).

### LGBT VETERAN HEALTH CARE

Top things gay, lesbian and bisexual Veterans should discuss at VHA visits:

Come out to your health care provider  
Mental health  
Substance use/ alcohol  
Tobacco use

Sexually transmitted infections  
Fitness  
Heart health  
Intimate partner violence

## FREE Parking & Shuttle Service Available!



Veterans may park at North Gate Mall and take FREE shuttles to and from the Durham VA Medical Center. The service runs Monday - Friday from 6 AM to 7 PM. The shuttles arrive and depart at 15 minute intervals at each location: Durham VA Medical Center - Main Entrance and North Gate Mall - in front of the Movie Theatre off the Gregson St./ I-85 Exit. GPS Address: 1058 W. Club Blvd, Durham, NC 27701.