



To care for those who have
borne the battle

Working with the VA to improve the health of West Virginia Veterans

Disclosures and Disclaimers

No disclosures

Not speaking as an official
representative of the VA or
the federal government

Objectives

Understand	Understand the network of various VA facilities in the state of West Virginia
Understand	Understand services available to West Virginia veterans
Understand	Understand how civilian PCPs can work with VA PCPs to facilitate veteran care
Understand	Understand common veteran health issues

West Virginia's Veteran Population

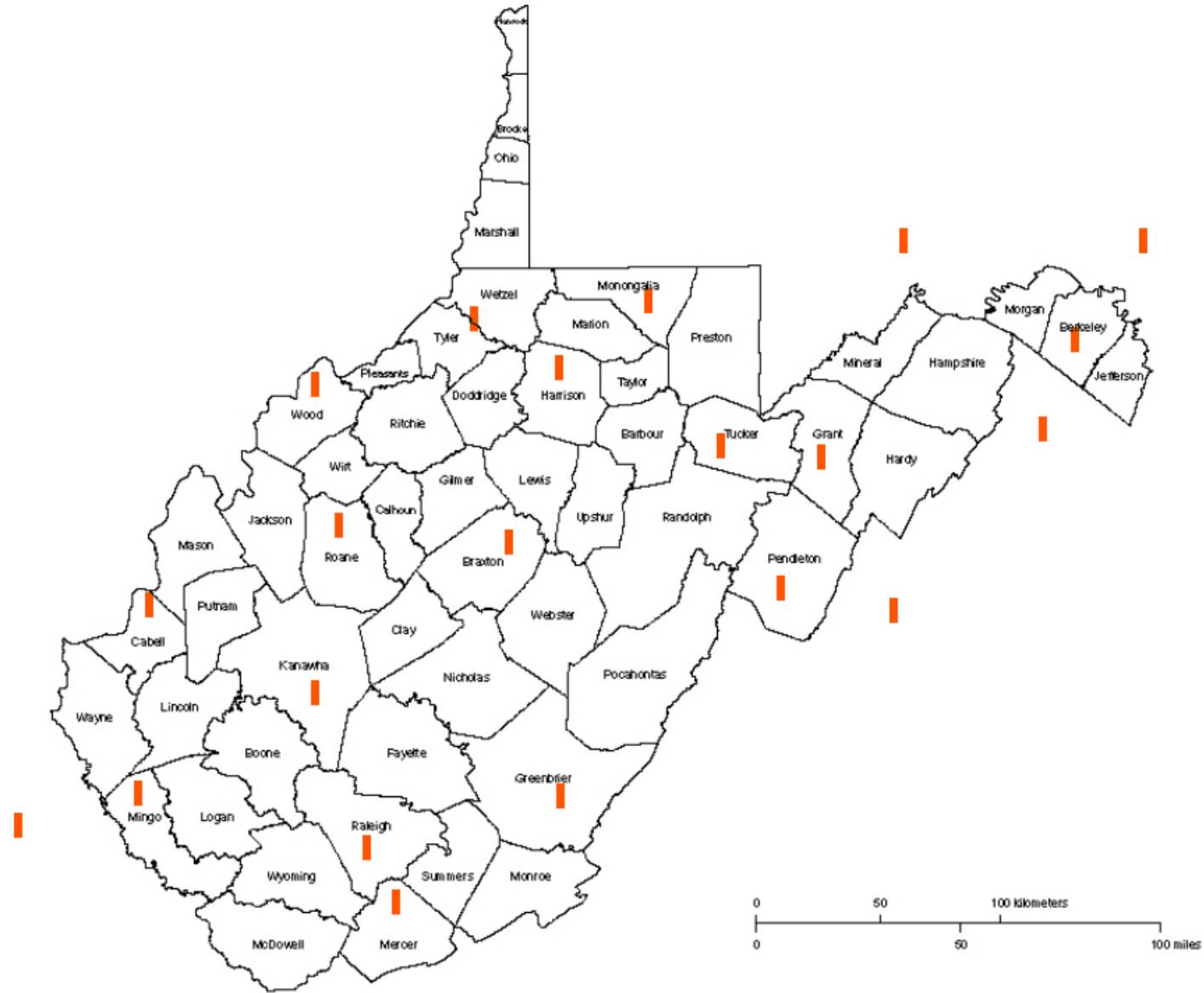
- One of the highest per capita populations of veterans in the nation
- 147,869 veterans
- 137,874 male veterans
- 9,995 female veterans
- 75% of WV veterans are older than age 50
- 65% of WV veterans served in the Gulf War era or the Vietnam era

Source: State of West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance, 2018 annual report

West Virginia's VA Facilities

- Combination of medical centers (VAMC) with satellite clinics, or "CBOCS"
 - **Beckley VAMC:** Greenbrier County and Princeton CBOCs
 - **Hershel Woody Williams VAMC** (Huntington): Charleston, Gallipolis (OH), Lenore (Williamson, WV), Prestonsburg (KY)
 - **Louis A. Johnson VAMC** (Clarksburg): Braxton County, Monongalia County, Tucker County, Wood County, and Rural Mobile Unit
 - **Martinsburg VAMC:** Cumberland (MD), Fort Detrick (MD), Franklin, Hagerstown, Harrisonburg (VA), Petersburg, Stephens City (VA)
- Home-based primary care
- State Veteran's Nursing Home
 - Located adjacent to LAJVAMC but ran by the state

WEST VIRGINIA



General eligibility guidelines

- Must have received a “other than dishonorable” discharge
- If enlisted after 9/7/1980 or entered active duty after 10/16/1981, must have served 24 continuous months active duty OR been federally activated Reservists or Guard members who served the full period called to active duty
 - STATE activation of the national guard DOES NOT COUNT
- Service-connected conditions: conditions incurred or aggravated during a period of service
- Military Sexual Trauma: Experienced sexual trauma during active duty or training
 - No minimum service requirement
- Psychosis or Mental Illness: Developed within two years of discharge
- When in doubt, call 877-333-8487 or apply online

Is VA healthcare free?

Short answer: No

Long answer: It depends

The VA can now bill certain third-party providers

Cannot bill Medicare or Medicaid

Primary Care in the VA

- VA PCPs truly serve as the point of entry for the VA medical system
- Veterans are assigned to a PCP and a patient-aligned care team, or PACT
- In general, need to see VA PCP at least once every 2 years to remain on PACT and “in the system”
- Responsible for placing the vast majority of orders, community consults, and consults with other VA facilities

The MISSION Act

- Important piece of legislation passed in 2018 that greatly expanded the ability of veterans to access care outside the VA, while having that care covered by VA benefits
- To receive care under MISSION ACT outside of the VA, must have an approved consult entered by a VA physician (almost always primary care)
- Additional qualifications: No full-service VA facility in your state, a service not available at ANY VA facility (maternity care), live too far from the nearest VA facility (40 miles), or in general the referring VA physician believes it is in your best medical interest to receive this care outside
- Takes money away from the VA and the referring VAMC, so there are people who review this closely and not all consults are approved

Other important VA services

- Mental health including substance abuse treatment
- Transgender care
- HISA grants: Home Improvement and Structural Alterations
- Housing assistance
- Food assistance
- Emergency and urgent care services
- Family caregiver support
- DME availability

I'm an outside PCP...what does this mean for me?

- Great question!
- MISSION Act PCPs are a thing
- You may very well be sharing primary care duties with a VA physician
- You're having trouble connecting a patient with important social services
- Your patient requires medication assistance
- COVID19 vaccines

I'm an outside
PCP...what
does this mean
for me?

- Communication with VA PCPs
- Communication with VA specialists
- Coordination of care

Case Study #1

- Mr. S is a 72 year-old man who lives in New Martinsville. You see him at a local clinic as his primary care provider. You know that he is a veteran and that he occasionally goes to Clarksburg for services. He gets his medications filled down the road at Wal Mart.
- He recently lost his medication prescription coverage and is worried about affording his medicines for diabetes. His peripheral neuropathy has also worsened and he is having trouble safely navigating the stairs into his house.
- How can the VA help?

Case Study #1

- Several ways!
- He should have an assigned VA PCP and PACT team. He can contact them about his medications and begin receiving medications through the VA, which are generally cheaper than elsewhere.
- If he has a history of Agent Orange exposure, many of his medical needs will be considered service-connected and he will incur no cost for them
- He may qualify for a HISA grant to get a ramp installed at his house
- VA PCP can place a CITC for primary care and facilitate future care
- He can also get his COVID shot!

Case Study #2

- Mrs. K is a 55 yo woman who regularly sees you for treatment of her hypertension as well as her anxiety and depression.
- One day, you discover that she is in fact a veteran. Because you are a great PCP and have established excellent rapport with her, she discloses that much of her depression and anxiety is related to a sexual assault that occurred while she was in the service
- How can the VA help?

Case Study #2

- If she feels comfortable, she can disclose this military sexual trauma (MST) to her local VA facility
- She can then receive sensitive, trauma-informed care and mental health services through the VA
- She does not have to “prove” that the assault occurred

Case Study #3

- Mr. M is a 76 yo veteran from Lewis County. He has uncontrolled atrial fibrillation, severe lumbar spinal stenosis, and significant cardiomyopathy.
- His wife is unable to drive and he can no longer safely do so due to developing vascular dementia. He has a great deal of difficulty leaving the house and has been admitted to the hospital for heart failure exacerbation seven times since October. He is extremely physically deconditioned.
- How can the VA help?

Case Study #3

- Home-based primary care
- HBPC team can travel to his house and provide regular nursing, physical therapy, and primary care to him in the comfort of his home
- HBPC team can also arrange for important DME such as hooyer lift, hospital bed, and bedside toilet

Common health issues experienced by veterans

- Mental health disorders: PTSD, mood disorders, substance use disorders
- Agent Orange and other exposures
- Military sexual trauma

Veterans' Mental Health

- High rates of PTSD and depression, especially among Vietnam veterans
- Estimates are that as many as 1 in 3 veterans have some symptoms of depression with 1 in 10 requiring treatment
- Veterans from the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are also prone to PTSD, depression, as well as the long term effects of traumatic brain injuries

Environmental Exposures

- Agent Orange
 - Linked to numerous conditions including leukemia, bladder cancer, diabetes
- Burn Pits
 - Inhalation of toxic chemicals causing chronic lung disease
- Depleted uranium
 - Linkage with chronic joint problems and kidney problems
- Asbestos
- Radiation
- ExposureEd app

Military Sexual Trauma

- 1 in 4 female veterans
- 1 in 100 male veterans
- Almost certainly higher numbers than reported
- Women are at greater risk by percentage, but **40% of veterans who disclose MST are men**
- Source: Daughters of American Veterans MST fact sheet

Conclusion

- Veterans are a substantial population in West Virginia and have numerous services available to them through the VA health systems
- Veterans who are receiving any services through the VA will have a PCP assigned in the VA and can also have an outside PCP
- Veterans of many different conflicts can experience unique, service-related illnesses