Finding a Place to Call Home
Dear Veterans,

As another year draws to a close, it’s a good time to reflect upon all we have to be grateful for. For many of us, that means family, health care, food, and housing — necessities we often take for granted. But for some in our Veteran community, those necessities are just out of reach. An estimated 40,000 Veterans every night are homeless. We are committed to reaching as many Veterans as possible and sharing resources to support them and their families when they need us most.

In support of that goal, VISN 1 is proud to work with Volunteers of America and other organizations to create a unique community in Maine for Veterans in need of housing. Cabin In The Woods (pages 4-5) was built to provide housing for homeless Veterans and their families. Other housing support in the community comes from HUD-VA Supportive Housing program vouchers and the annual Homeless Stand Down Event in Maine (page 5).

But our programs can only succeed when we can reach the Veterans who need us. That’s where our innovative Outreach team steps in. Along with coordinating Veteran-oriented events, VA New England’s Outreach team creates a VA presence at local events to reach Veterans who may not be aware of the resources available to them. Read more about this inspiring team on page 3.

Finally, the success of all the programs at VA New England is a result of the dedication of the unique and caring individuals who make up our team. One individual who embodies the spirit of VISN 1 is Master Sergeant Kara Vautour. You can read about the difference she makes on page 6.

With thanks for your service,

Ryan Lilly, MPA
Network Director
Outreach Team
Hits the Road

Sometimes, one of the biggest challenges to providing benefits to Veterans is finding the Veterans. There are many misconceptions about what benefits are available and about who meets the requirements to utilize them. Many Veterans who have earned benefits don’t know it. Some aren’t aware of how many outpatient clinics are nearby, or what a high standard of care the VA New England gives. Still others may have caretakers who don’t know to reach out to the VA for help.

That’s where the VISN 1 Outreach Team steps in. This one-of-a-kind team attends hundreds of local events every year to ensure that as many Veterans and caregivers as possible are receiving the benefits they’ve earned. Paul Corbett, VISN Deputy Outreach Program Manager, explains that they especially strive to have a presence at non-Veteran events, where they are more likely to reach Veterans who don’t use the VA than at VA events. They have visited everywhere from a tattoo convention to a flower show. “We’ll try anything once,” says Corbett.

Along the way, they share the truth about VA benefits and care, debunking myths that may have kept some away and enrolling Veterans on the spot. They’ve used focus groups to identify barriers to using VA healthcare, and are dismantling those barriers one Veteran at a time, helping them receive the benefits they deserve.

The Outreach Team is often the first interaction a Veteran has with the VA and that makes it especially important to put their best foot forward to establish relationships. Every member of the team is a Veteran, a fact that helps to build trust with a population that may have trust issues.

The goal is to reach as many Veterans as they can. They don’t limit outreach to local Veterans or assume that older Veterans already use the VA; they’ve enrolled Veterans from as far away as Arizona, and as old as 102. Location and age don’t matter; removing barriers does.

To further their reach, the team also creates ads for radio, TV, and websites, as well as a mobile app and literature to help Veterans understand and access their benefits. Both the app and the literature are being updated in 2019 to stay current and to be even easier to use.

For more information, including events, the VA New England Mobile App, and printable literature, visit www.newengland.va.gov/outreach.
Cabin in the Woods
Helping Homeless Veterans Heal

According to 2017 data, the number of homeless Veterans is up over 40,000 — reflecting the first increase in 7 years. Some contributing factors are health issues, lack of affordable housing, difficulty finding jobs, and limited access to healthcare and support services. The VA is dedicated to addressing these barriers and ending Veteran homelessness.

To that end, VA New England has collaborated on an innovative way to provide healthcare, affordable housing, and support services all in one place: Cabin in the Woods.

Cabin in the Woods is a community of 21 ADA accessible cabins built on a quiet 11-acre site on the Togus campus. It was built on land leased from the VA through the Enhanced-Use Lease program that allows the VA to lease out underutilized land to build housing for Veterans who are homeless or at-risk.

The project was led by Volunteers of America Northern New England, along with the VA and many community partners. Together, they developed 1- and 2-bedroom homes in a therapeutic wooded setting. The project is a first of its kind, and the first in Maine to provide housing for both male and female Veterans and their families.

The community consists of 16 1-bedroom cabins and 5 2-bedroom cabins, another for staff to use, and a large 4,000 square foot version for community and office space. Individual homes are cozy — under 800 square feet. The community was designed to provide as much privacy as possible to foster a peaceful, healing environment for Veterans and their families.
But the Cabin in the Woods project isn’t just about housing. It also happens to be within walking distance of the Togus VA Medical Center, providing convenient access to medical care and services. Along with providing affordable housing and resources, the project focuses on finding employment and rebuilding families. Partners and children are welcome. Cabin in the Woods will work with a variety of organizations to support those goals and help Veterans get back on their feet.

The Cabin in the Woods community opened its doors to Veterans and their families recently. But currently, medical care is only provided for adult Veterans; however, leadership recognized that children will be living on the property and made the decision to train staff in PALS – Pediatric Advanced Life Support.

Jim Worcester is a Patient Care Coordinator and nursing supervisor. He took on the role as PALS trainer the minute he heard about the Cabin in the Woods project.

“Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn are creating a whole host of younger Veterans and with the increased availability of women’s health care at VA Maine we have the potential to have children on station at any time. If one of these children were to have a medical emergency or get hurt while here, it is great to know we have the skills and equipment to stabilize them for transport to an appropriate medical facility,” said Worcester.

The staff hope to never need to use PALS, but will be prepared if the need arises.

VA Maine held their annual Homeless Stand Down Event on October 13, hosting homeless Veterans from across the state. The full-day event offered services and resources to Veterans that are homeless or in transitional housing. Some of the resources offered included food, free boots and clothing, personal care items and housing assistance.

The event identified 133 Veterans in need, and placed 62 in permanent housing that day, while continuing to work on placements for the rest.

Know someone who may need help? Contact VA’s National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-4AID-VET (877-424-3838).

Thank you for your service. Now let us serve you.
Providers Who Served: Kara Vautour, OT

When Master Sergeant Kara Vautour went back to school to become an Occupational Therapist (OT), her goal was to work at the VA. During her deployments to Iraq and Germany, she saw the firsthand effects of war and wanted to give back to the generations who came before her. “So many men and women laid the path for me to have had the incredible life changing experiences I have been blessed to be a part of,” she said. “If I can put those experiences to use to connect with another Veteran and help them feel more comfortable or safe during their time in rehab then it’s the least I can do.”

Vautour joined the Air Force Reserve in 2003 and is currently stationed with the 439th ASTS at Westover ARB in Chicopee. She is a Medical Technician with an Aeromedical Staging Squadron.

She also works as an OT in the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitative Services department of the VA Boston Healthcare System’s West Roxbury campus. Her experiences at West Roxbury have led her to volunteer with the Adaptive Sports and Recreation program, which uses adaptive activities and sports to promote rehabilitation.

She continues to give back as a member of the local chapter of Team RWB, a national organization that bridges the gap between Veterans and Civilians through physical and social activities.

When asked what important lessons she’s learned in her career, Vautour says “I think it will be years, if ever, before I even truly realize how much I have learned from the military. Some of the biggest are resiliency and hope, which go hand and hand.”

“Working in the medical field and interacting with so many injured day in and day out; hope is vital. Never lose hope.”

Camaraderie and surrounding yourself with people you trust and checking in on them has been key for resiliency. People ARE the mission and your battle buddy gets you through the tough times and helps you find the positive. Find your tribe and love them hard.”
New England Fisher Houses: Home Away From Home

VA New England is a proud home of three Fisher House locations, providing temporary housing at no charge to eligible families of patients at nearby VA medical centers. The houses, donated by the Fisher family and Fisher House Foundation, provide a home away from home for families while their Veteran is receiving treatment through the VA. Eligibility and criteria for stays are determined by the medical center where each house is located. For questions about requirements, contact the manager of the specific house.

Fisher House Boston, the first in New England, opened in 2010 on the campus of the West Roxbury VA Medical Center. It houses twenty suites. For more information, contact House Manager Beth St. Pierre, (857) 203-4000, elizabeth.stpierre@va.gov

The sixteen suite Fisher House Connecticut, located on the West Haven campus, was dedicated on May 4, 2018 and began hosting families the same week. For information, contact House Manager Amanda Salthouse, (203) 937-3438, amanda.salthouse@va.gov

A groundbreaking ceremony was held August 8 for New England’s newest Fisher House, located on the Togus Campus. The 16-suite, 13,500 square foot home will be completed in 2019.

More Housing Vouchers aid Homeless Veterans

In April, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program granted 27 new rental assistance vouchers to Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. The additional vouchers bring the total in that area to 436 to provide homes to Veterans in need. The additional vouchers come at a time when homelessness has increased for the first time in seven years in the Veteran population.

The program is a collaboration between HUD and VA to provide rental assistance and supportive services through VA to homeless Veterans and their families. Over 93,000 vouchers have been awarded through the program since 2008, helping over 150,000 homeless Veterans.

Upcoming Events around VISN 1

Boston RV Show
Jan 18-21
Boston, MA

Saltwater Fishing Show
Mar 22-24
Providence, RI

Hunting & Fishing Show
Mar 29-31
Hartford, CT