



VA Prepares to Expand Eligibility - Priority 8

Eligibility for health care is always a subject of concern, and when that eligibility deals with Veterans, the concern can quickly become a national issue. In keeping with this reality, when hearing the news announced in January that the Department of Veterans Affairs was preparing to change eligibility criteria - many Veterans were undoubtedly concerned that some benefits would no longer be provided. Fortunately, that is simply not the case.

New VA regulations defined in Public Law 110-329 and expected to take effect in June, provide VA additional funding to allow expanded enrollment opportunity for certain Priority 8 Veterans who may have been previously denied enrollment in VA's health care system because their income exceeded VA's means tests thresholds.

"Having this additional funding allows the VA to relax the threshold," explained CAVHCS Chief, business office Helen Booker. "But it's important that everyone remember that this affects certain Priority Group 8 (higher income) Veterans whose household income does not exceed the current VA income thresholds (means test threshold and/or geographical means test threshold) by more than 10 percent."

In 1996, Congress established a priority-based enrollment system for VA and a uniform package of medical benefits for all enrollees. The legislation opened enrollment in VA's health care system to all eligible veterans and required that each year the Secretary of Veterans Affairs assess Veterans' demand for services and determine if the necessary resources are available to provide timely, quality care to all enrollees.

Enrollment for the lowest priority of the eight groups - veterans who are not being compensated for a military-related disability and who have incomes above a set threshold - was suspended on January 18, 2003, although veterans in that priority group who were already enrolled for care were permitted to remain enrolled.

VA originally suspended enrollment for Priority 8 veterans because it was unable to provide all enrolled veterans with timely access to its health care due to a tremendous growth in the number of veterans then seeking

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The Tuskegee Twins

Volunteers' Compassionate Contributions acknowledged

One of Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System's (CAVHCS) most valuable assets is its Volunteer Community and the unselfish and compassionate hours of support to Veterans that not only supports countless services, but represents thousands of dollars in savings as a direct result. But for two volunteers who were recently recognized during CAVHCS' Annual Volunteer Awards program, that value is realized in far more than mere dollars. It's simply priceless.

"The Twins have volunteered more than 17,500 hours," said CAVHCS Voluntary Service Chief William Petty. "That equates to more than \$285,700 in savings to the VA - each. Of course,

their efforts result in something far more valuable. It doesn't matter if you're staff or a Veteran, if you spend time with them your attitude will change for the better. You can't help from being affected by The Twins."

The Twins: If you say those two words on CAVHCS' Tuskegee Campus, and in the City of Tuskegee itself for that matter, people will know who you're talking about. "They enjoy the celebrity," said Ms. Lillie Hicks, a CAVHCS Clinical Dietician for more than 28 years, who also enjoys considerable notoriety as being the mother of The Twins. "Most of the people know them around here. But, it's a two way thing. They really enjoy a sense of worth by volunteering."

The Twins: Regina and Davina Hicks have been volunteering their time, love and attention to CAVHCS staff and Veterans for more than eight years. And, for two young ladies who have worked hard to overcome the challenges of Downs Syndrome, few - if any - have come so far to help so many. "First off - don't let them hear you call them girls," said Lillie laughing. "But, I don't think they realize they have a disability. I decided early on not to treat them any different. Others may have had to

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From the Director

Glen E. Struchtemeyer

I am both proud and excited to have been appointed as Director, Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System. And, I am especially pleased to say that while I have only been here a few days the sense of your compassionate professionalism is readily recognizable.

Prior to my arrival, I knew of CAVHCS' long tradition of providing superior service to our nation's Veterans. Your reputation of providing care second to none and commitment to ensuring every Veteran is personally satisfied with their outcome is well earned.

In the next several weeks I'll be visiting our facilities personally to see them firsthand and to meet many of you personally. Let me assure you that while I have years of experience as a Veterans Administration Medical Center Director, one of the most important lessons I've learned is that our accomplishments are dependant upon all of you being successful on a daily basis. Therefore, I plan to support your efforts – on a daily basis.

CAVHCS has an ambitious Nine Point Plan to maintain and expand services in the near future, and I am confident that we are capable of continuing our tradition of compassionate professionalism and providing superior service.

Finally, please keep in mind that I am a new arrival, so if names and your respective responsibilities don't come as soon as I'd like, I hope you'll understand. I am very happy to be here.



Director Struchtemeyer (bio picture and while attending the recent VISN Virtual Town Hall Meeting comes to CAVHCS after serving as Director, St. Louis VA Medical Center.

CAVHCS All-Stars

I would like to thank the VA Hospital and its staff for the great help I have received. I feel the VA has saved my life many times. My Primary Doctor; Dr. Wenimar D. Salvador on the Yellow Team is the greatest. He really looks out for my welfare. And his nurse Crystal is very nice, and makes sure I have all my shots and meds when I need them.

Also, Ms. Pace, and her team at the pulmonary department makes sure I keep breathing, and that means a lot to a person that can't breathe too good. They teach me how to relax and not panic. And Dr. Bok helps me with my anxiety. Ms. Thornton the dietician helps me to control my diet and salt intake. I don't know what I would do without them. And Dr. Salvador's wife is in the Pharmacy and it's always a pleasure to see her. She is so nice. -- John W. B.

I have been a patient under the care of Dr. Borlaza for years. She has medically and spiritually navigated me, as I have received negative medical exam reports on my body's condition. Dr. Borlaza truly cared about her patients and will be missed. -- Truly, Larry C.

The reason for my correspondence with you today is to convey my complete satisfaction with one of the Veteran employees, one Mr. Matthews Gibson, MSA working in the rehabilitation facility on the first floor. He has assisted me in scheduling of my appointments and on one occasion took his lunch period to push my wheelchair to prosthetics to have me fitted and receive a back brace. Sometimes my arms give out in our hospital as I have not yet received an electric scooter yet. In addition to helping me, I have witnessed him helping other Veterans with fulfilling their needs often on his own time and with the cheerfulness and camaraderie of a fellow Veteran. -- James F. V. Jr.

I am truly satisfied with the workers on the Green Team. Please thank Dr. Okafor, Bill Johnson, Jessie Free, Barbara Geneux, Sandra Jones, J. Morgan, Annie Moore-Smith and Eddie Mae Scott. -- Nathaniel H.

I would like to say thank you for the great treatment we Vets receive here at CAVHCS. It's truly appreciated and we LOVE the job you do! -- Thanks, Max R.

The CAVHCS Salute



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The Joint Commission

The CAVHCS Salute is produced by the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care (CAVHCS) Public Affairs Office. CAVHCS Salute is an unofficial, internal communications publication.

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Employees of the Month



Tuskegee Campus Ms. Linda Echols

Ms. Linda Echols has been selected as the Employee of the Month from the Tuskegee Campus. An employee of the Occupational Therapy Department, she considers her job responsibilities a service to our nation's heroes. She is also committed and dedicated to improving the quality of life for all Veterans that she serves. As an advocate for the Veterans, she has demonstrated her commitment to make sure each Veteran is treated fairly and receives all the services which they are entitled to for serving their country.

She is also known for burning the "midnight oil" to ensure that the Occupational Therapy department and all programs for the Veteran are at their highest quality. Ms. Echols is considered by her staff members, PMR staff and other employees at CAVHCS as a true professional. She runs an efficient department and at all times instills in her employees the importance of maintaining their professional attitudes and quality of care. She exemplifies CAVHCS in her excellence in offering unparalleled patient services. She instills trust, commitment and respect from patients and staff alike. She is an inspiration to those around her.

'The Twins'

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adapt, but we decided they would be included in everything."

That approach has served The Twins well. After graduating High School, complete with stints on the Debutant Court, The Twins graduated from the Auburn Achievement Center before joining CAVHCS. "Davina was the first to start," said Lillie. "But both of them have been very well received here. For example, when Davina was working in the Nursing Home, Ms. Byner developed a color-coded filing system so Davina could do more than custodial work. Nowadays, there are times when they tell me that they're going to be in charge. I tell them to be kind to the staff."

After working in the Blind Clinic, Physical Therapy and EEO or in support of celebrations and especially CAVHCS parades, The Twins have become interwoven into the fabric of the Tuskegee Campus. "If they don't come into work I hear about it," said Lillie. "Staff and Veterans will ask if they're okay and when they're coming back, but mostly I hear it from The Twins. Even if I have a day off they'll get me to bring them in. They've got to be doing something. Actually, I feel very fortunate that they have somewhere like CAVHCS to go to."

CAVHCS Salute - April 2009 Edition

Montgomery Campus Mr. Melvin Holstin



Melvin C. Holston, Supply Technician of Logistics Services (SPD) Supply Processing and Distribution has been selected as the employee of the month for April. Through his hard work and fortitude, CAVHCS has been able to provide outstanding access to coordinated care for our Veterans.

CAVHCS SPD is now recognized as the network leader. He has maintained 100% accountability of all purchases with no findings during the purchase card audits; processing 99% of all assets received and distributed within CAVHCS SPD and facilities.

The diligent efforts of Mr. Holston working with the GIP (Generic Inventory Packaged) to ensure all items purchased and distributed were entered and dropped out of the system, continually reflect positive turnover rates. Mr. Holston also serves as timekeeper for the East and West Campuses in which he was selected due to his outstanding professionalism; he has continually demonstrated outstanding professionalism with no official complaints of error in his record keeping. Mr. Holston is a valuable asset to CAVHCS as an employee

And CAVHCS is happy to have their support. "Every year they get their church involved in our annual awards program," said Petty. "As a result we enjoy a greater awareness in the community, but more importantly The Twins have actually recruited other volunteers!

"They consider what they do here to be their job and take it seriously," added Petty. "So if you're staff and they give one of their loving, 'You're specials,' or my personal favorite, 'You da Man,' don't be surprised if get an equally loving, 'Time to get back to Work,' shortly afterward."



The Twins; Regina and Davina Hicks provide a smile and an assuring touch to a CAVHCS Veteran recently in Physical Therapy.



CAVHCS Stand Down efforts return to Columbus, Ga. area

Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS), in cooperation with The Georgia Center for Veterans Rehabilitation, Employment/Education and Training and the U.S. Department of Labor conducted a Homeless Veteran Stand Down Saturday April 25 in the Elizabeth Bradley Turner Center on the Columbus State University campus.

Throughout the day CAVHCS provided services to Veterans ranging from Medical Screenings and Podiatry to support from the Women's Wellness, OEF/OIF Seamless Transition and Veterans Industries programs.



'Enrollment'

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enrollment. VA now plans to reopen enrollment for a portion of these veterans without compromising the Department's ability to provide high quality health care services to all enrolled veterans who are eligible for care.

The results of a means test thresholds and/or geographical means test thresholds remain key issues for Veterans seeking enrollment. Since 2003 Veterans applying for enrollment who found themselves in Priority Group 8 were denied enrollment. However, if Veterans have applied on or after January 1, 2009 and denied enrollment because their income exceeded the VA income threshold, VA will determine if they are eligible under this new rule once the new regulations take effect.

These same Veterans will not need to submit another application for enrollment. Those Veterans who applied for enrollment on or after January 1, 2009 and deemed eligible under this new rule, will be notified by mail. These veterans will receive a letter from the VA Health Eligibility Center notifying them of their eligibility for enrollment and welcoming them to the VA health care system. Included with the letter will be instructions for

getting care and how to obtain a Veterans Identification Card.

If Veterans has applied for enrollment before January 1, 2009, and were denied enrollment because their income was too high, VA encourages them to take advantage of the VA's enrollment calculator (<http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/apps/enrollmentcalculator/>) to assist in determining if they are now eligible for enrollment under this new regulation. Whatever the specific enrollment determination, VA encourages all Veterans to apply for enrollment as this will help VA in our future planning and budget efforts as well as allow us to be in a better position to identify necessary funding levels to Congress.

On the effective date of the regulation, a Veteran who applies for enrollment, who does not qualify for a higher priority group and whose income exceeds VA's means test thresholds by 10 percent or less will be placed in a priority group that allows the veteran to be enrolled in VA's health care system.

"This change will probably encourage a lot of our Category 8 Veterans to submit a new means test," said Booker. "In fact, considering our current economic climate, many of their financial situations may have changed dramatically. However, the first step for any Veteran who thinks their situation has changed enough to change their category should be to take advantage of the calculator on-line."

President Announces

Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record

WASHINGTON – The President, along with Secretary Gates and Secretary Shinseki, recently announced that the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs have taken the first step in creating a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record. Currently, there is no comprehensive system in place that allows for a streamlined transition of health care records between DOD and the VA. Both Departments will work together to define and build a system that will ultimately contain administrative and medical information from the day an individual enters military service throughout their military career, and after they leave the military.

Access to electronic records is essential to modern health care delivery and the paperless administration of benefits. It provides a framework to ensure that all health care providers have all the information they need to deliver high-quality health care while reducing medical errors. The creation of this Joint Virtual Lifetime Record by the two organizations would take the next leap to delivering seamless, high-quality care, and serve as a model for the nation.

The President understands that those who serve and have served our country in uniform are America's greatest strategic asset. The President's commitment to the sacred trust we have with those who serve is clear in both the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs budgets and in the strong leadership of Secretaries Gates and Shinseki.

The President believes that the quality of care that our veterans receive should never be hindered by budget delays. He has shared this concern with Secretary Shinseki, and they have worked together to support advanced

funding of veterans medical care. What that means is a timely and predictable flow of funding from year to year, but more importantly, that means better care for our veterans. The President was pleased to see that the Senate-passed budget supported this concept in a bipartisan manner.

The Department of Defense Budget will:

- Continue the steady growth in medical research and development by requesting \$400 million more than last year.
- Recognize the critical and permanent nature of wounded, ill and injured, traumatic brain injury, and psychological health programs. This means institutionalizing and properly funding these efforts in the base budget and increasing overall spending by \$300 million. The department will spend over \$47 billion on healthcare in FY10.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Budget will:

- Increase funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs by \$25 billion above baseline over the next five years.
- Expand eligibility for veterans' health care to over 500,000 veterans who were previously denied care by 2013.
- Enhance outreach and services related to mental health care and cognitive injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, with a focus on access for veterans in rural areas.
- Invest in better technology to deliver services and benefits to veterans with the quality and efficiency they deserve.
- Combat homelessness by safeguarding vulnerable veterans.

Golden Age Games set for Birmingham in June

From California to New York, an estimated 700 "golden age" Veterans will travel to Birmingham, Ala., to compete June 1-5 in the world's largest sports and recreational competition for senior Veterans.

The Golden Age Games are open to all U.S. military Veterans age 55 or older who receive care at a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facility. The games give participants the opportunity to compete in ambulatory, visually-impaired and wheelchair divisions, according to their ages. Events include swimming, bicycling, bowling, croquet, air rifle, golf, shuffleboard, horseshoes, discus and shot put.

The 23rd National Veterans Golden Age Games are co-sponsored by VA, Help Hospitalized Veterans (HHV) and the Veterans Canteen Service (VCS). This year's event is hosted by the VA medical center in Birmingham.

The games are designed to improve the quality of life for all older Veterans, including those with a wide range

of abilities and disabilities, and serve as a qualifier for the National Senior Games held every other year.

The majority of the competitive events, including the opening and closing ceremonies, will be held at the Birmingham Jefferson Convention Center. The opening ceremony will take place at 7 p.m. on Monday, June 1. Closing ceremonies will be held at 7 p.m. on Friday, June 5, at the convention center.

For more information on the Golden Age Games, log onto the games website at www.Veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov






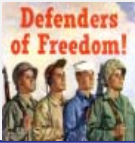




Wheelchair Games Gold Medal winning bowler, Rick Peterson (r) recently visited CAVHCS and signed autographs for Veterans and staff.



CAVHCS kicked off The 2009 Champion's Challenge -which is designed to increase awareness of the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans - April 1 on both the Montgomery and here at the Tuskegee Campuses.

The new Guidelines are evidence-based and recommend that adults perform at least 150 minutes of moderateintensity aerobic activity each week to achieve long term health benefits.

May

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Asian Pacific American Heritage Month - www.apaha.org Allergy and Asthma Awareness Month - www.breatherville.org; www.ppsinc.org Hepatitis Awareness Month - www.hepatitisfoundation.org Huntington's Disease Awareness Month - www.hdsa.org Mental Health Month - www.mentalhealthamerica.net; www.nmha.org National Arthritis Month - www.arthritis.org					1	2
3	4	5	 National Nurses Day	7	8	9
National Nurses Week - www.nursingworld.org North American Occupational Safety and Health Week- www.asse.org						
 Mother's Day	11	12	13	14	Peace Officer Memorial Day 	16
National Hospital Week- www.imprintmall.com/hospitalweek National Nursing Home Week - www.nnhw.org National Police Week - www.nleomf.com; www.aphf.org						
Armed Forces Day 	18	19	National Employee Health and Fitness Day 	American Red Cross Founded (1881) 	22	23
		National Medical Transcriptionist Week - www.aamt.org				
24	 Memorial Day (Observed)	25	26	National Senior Health & Fitness Day 	28	29
31	Oncology Nursing Month - www.ons.org National Osteoporosis Awareness and Prevention Month - www.nof.org National Trauma Awareness Month - www.amtrauma.org Older Americans Month - www.aoa.gov/pressobservances/oam/oam.aspx Stroke Awareness Month - www.stroke.org; www.strokeassociation.org National High Blood Pressure Education Month - www.nhlbi.nih.gov					

The CAVHCS Community Calendar is not intended to be an all-inclusive, official calendar. It is intended rather to provide a medium for CAVHCS Salute to share upcoming events.

If you would like to add a CAVHCS event please email details directly to alan.bloom@va.gov. Submissions are not guaranteed to be published. Editorial considerations will be made for propriety, promptness and print space.