

LIVING Better

A Butler VA Quarterly Magazine

Spring 2024

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us with your health care

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BUTLER VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM'S SPRING 24' HIGHLIGHTS



During Heart health month in February, a Hands-only CPR demonstration was held as part of the month-long awareness campaign. Everyone is encouraged to learn hands-only CPR.



Butler VA celebrated National Vietnam Veterans Day on March 29. Vietnam Veterans and their families were thanked for their service and provided special lapel pins. Thank you for your service.



Staff took a few moments to watch the Great North American Eclipse that occurred on April 8. The eclipse was a total solar eclipse covering parts of North America, Mexico, and Canada.



On April 9, the Housing and Redevelopment Authority of the County of Butler hosted the HUD Region III Regional Administrator who presented new VASH awards to both Butler and Mercer Public Housing Authorities.



On April 1, Butler VA opened the new Infusion Clinic. The clinic is a designated, comfortable space where Veterans can receive intravenous infusions or injections.



In March, Veterans and their families participated in a drop-in work shop to build bird houses. Additional drop-in work shops are planned for the year as part of the Creative Arts Program.



To conclude Whole Health month in April, a Whole Health Expo was held to showcase the variety of programs, services, and activities available to help Veterans with their total health and well-being.



Butler VA police partnered with the DEA for the semi-annual Drug Take Back Day in April. Veterans can also dispose of unused medication at any time at a receptacle located at the Health Care Center.



Veterans, staff, and volunteers at the Community Living Center participated in the annual VA 2K Walk and Roll Event held in May. This was the first time since the COVID pandemic of 2020 that the Veterans have been able to participate in the event.

Cover Photo

101-year-old WWII Navy Veteran, James Roberto, who was recognized through the VA's Centenarian Program.



Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of the Butler VA,

I hope you enjoy this issue of "Living Better" and that you are enjoying the rainy spring weather. We have had a lot going on these past few months. We opened an Infusion Clinic and Veteran Resource Center. We hosted many events to include a special day to thank our Vietnam Veterans and outreach events to educate Veterans and their families about VA health care. And, we were ranked 1st in the nation for patient trust. We have much more planned for the coming year and look forward to serving you.

Have a safe and wonderful summer!

Sharon Coyle, Director

C O N T E N T S

Spring 2024



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PACT Act Health Care Expanded Eligibility

On March 5, VA announced that all Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military – at home or abroad – are now eligible to enroll directly in VA health care. This expansion eliminates the phased-in approach making eligibility available now for Veterans who meet the minimum active-duty service requirements.



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Thank you Veterans for trusting us with your health care

This spring, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that Veteran trust in the Butler VA had risen to 96.6%, up from 91.8% in 2018 when the survey first began. VA is delivering more care and more benefits to more Veterans than ever before and as Veteran trust continues to grow, more Veterans are choosing VA for their health care needs.



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Veteran Community Partnerships

Veteran Community Partnerships (VCPs) bring together VA and community organizations to connect with Veterans and provide community resources to augment the exceptional care Veterans receive through the VA. VCP's provide opportunities to meet the diverse needs of Veterans and their families.



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Health Tech, Tips, & Tastes

What's new and interesting in VA's health technology? Find out! Also enjoy a health tip and tasty recipe.

and more...

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Butler VA Health Care System

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PACT Act Health Care Expanded Eligibility



On March 5, VA announced that all Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military – at home or abroad – are now eligible to enroll directly in VA health care. This means that all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11 are eligible to enroll in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits. Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States are eligible to enroll.

This expansion of VA health care eliminates the phased-in approach called for by the PACT Act – meaning that millions of Veterans are becoming eligible for VA health care up to eight years earlier than written into law. VA encourages all eligible Veterans to visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more.





**DID YOU SERVE IN
AFGHANISTAN,
IRAQ, OR ANY
OTHER COMBAT
ZONE AFTER 9/11?**

EXPANDED HEALTH CARE ELIGIBILITY

**Apply for VA health care
today at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT).**



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



In addition to expanding access to VA care, this decision makes it quicker and easier for millions of Veterans to enroll. Many Veterans believe they must apply to receive VA disability compensation benefits to become eligible for VA health care, but this is not correct. With this expansion and other authorities, millions of eligible Veterans can enroll directly in VA care – without any need to first apply for VA benefits.

To be eligible to enroll in VA health care, Veterans must meet the minimum active-duty service requirements, have a qualifying discharge, and meet one or more eligibility requirements specific to VA health care. VA encourages all Veterans to apply to determine their enrollment eligibility. More information on eligibility can be found at www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility or by calling Butler VA's enrollment team at 800-362-8262.



**Thank you Veterans
for trusting us with
your health care**





On April 17, 2024, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that Veteran trust in the Butler VA has risen to 96.6% — up from 91.6% in 2018 (the first year VA began conducting this survey). Nationwide trust in VA outpatient care has increased to 91.8% — up from 85.6% in 2018 — of which Butler VA was leading the nation in trust scores.

“At the Butler VA, we strive to provide quality, exceptional, and timely care to Veterans and value their feedback, be it positive or negative, on their experiences so we can learn and grow together,” comments Sharon Coyle, Executive Director.

This survey is based on feedback from Veteran patients who received VA health care in the past 90 days. Within one week of using VA services, these Veterans were asked whether they trusted VA for their health care needs across a variety of categories — including scheduling an appointment, health care visits, in-person pharmacy, mail-order pharmacy, labs/imaging, and Veteran safety. This survey mirrors the findings of recent independent studies. According to Medicare’s latest nationwide survey of patients, VA hospitals outperformed non-VA hospitals on all 10 core patient satisfaction metrics. VA health care has also consistently outperformed non-VA care in peer-reviewed studies, overall quality ratings, and affordability for Veterans.

Butler VA incorporates a variety of practices to ensure Veterans have a positive and trusting experience. The facility has an engaged Patient Advocacy program that includes service level advocates who are available at the point of service to address Veteran concerns quickly. A Veteran Input Pool (VIP) Committee meets monthly to provide feedback on programming and facility operations. Butler VA is a High Reliability Organization (HRO) and has implemented practices and procedures to ensure an environment of safety that includes Leadership Rounding, Veteran Townhalls, Environment of Care (EOC) Rounding, systems redesign projects, trainings, and safety forums. The Veteran Experience Office provides regular customer service training opportunities to staff such as Tour of Duty and Own-the-Moment and oversees the New Veteran Orientation Tour (NVOT) program that is designed to provide Veterans with a customized overview of the facility and programs.

VA is delivering care and benefits to more Veterans than ever before. In 2023, VA set a new record with 116 million health care appointments. As Veteran trust in VA has increased, more Veterans have also begun to choose VA. For more information about Veteran trust in VA, visit www.va.gov/initiatives/veteran-trust-in-va or contact Louella McKee, Veteran Experience Officer, at 878-271-6937.

Veteran Community Partnerships



Veteran Community Partnerships (VCPs) are organized partnerships that bring together VA staff and community organizations to build relationships, exchange information, educate each other and the public on resources available to Veterans and collaborate to reduce barriers that impede Veteran access to care or services. Through these partnerships, VA can make connections to Veterans who may not be utilizing the VA and connect enrolled Veterans to resources that can augment the care and services they are already receiving.

Butler VA re-instituted the VCP program locally in 2020 and grew the total number of partnerships to 10 in 2022. Today, the program boasts 21 vetted and approved community partners. All approved community partners are vetted prior to signing a Memorandum of Agreement.



“We want our Veterans and their families to have diverse choices in the care and services they are receiving,” comments Karen Dunn. “We welcome referrals and suggestions for programs so that we can provide even greater opportunities and positive experiences to those we serve.”

To learn more, go to <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/vcp.asp> or contact Karen Dunn, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and VCP Coordinator, at 878-271-6484.

ART

1. **Steele's Brushes & Ceramics**
Butler — (724-679-0448)
Discounts for Veterans
2. **The Art Center**
Butler — (724-283-6922)
Discounted membership rate and free woodturning classes for Veterans
3. **Butler Area Wood Turners**
Butler — (724-991-2477)
Free woodturning classes for Veterans

MUSIC

4. **Guitars for Vets**
Butler — (412-580-1718)
Free guitar lessons for Veterans
5. **Warrior Music Foundation**
New Castle & Monroeville
(310-852-1011)
Free guitar lessons and music for Veterans and dependents

HEALTH & WELLNESS

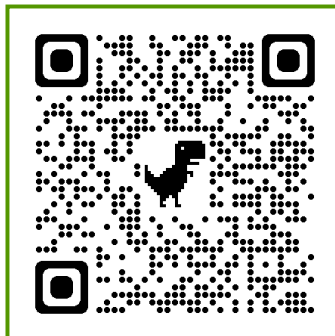
6. **Butler YMCA**
Butler — (724-287-4733 x115)
Joining fee waived for Veterans
7. **Lawrence County YMCA**
New Castle — (724-658-4766)
Joining fee waived for Veterans
8. **Aurelius**
Wexford — (724-433-9009)
Free Mind-Body-Soul regimen for Veterans



9. **Take Care Tips with Jennifer Antkowiak**
878-271-6158 or
<https://takecaretips.com>
Resources for Caregivers & Veterans.
10. **It's About The Warrior Foundation**
(itsaboutthewarrior@zoominternet.net)
Free programs, services, and events for post 9/11 Veterans.
11. **Legacy Fitness**
Butler — (724-991-7299)
Discounted fitness classes for Veterans
12. **March of Dimes**
amcafee@marchofdimes.org
Programs/services and annual military baby shower.

ANIMAL RELATED

13. **Storm Harbor Equestrian Center**
Slippery Rock — (724-738-4010)
Free equestrian lessons for Veterans and their family



14. **Elliott Acres Therapeutic Riding Center**
Butler — (724-991-2477)
Free equestrian lessons for Veterans and their family
15. **Fly High With Horses**
Hermitage — (724-866-2743)
Free equestrian lessons for Veterans and their family
16. **STAT Inc. Ligonier Therapeutic Center**
Ligonier & Zelienople — (833-328-7828)
Free equine-assisted learning for Veterans and their family
17. **Horses & Heroes**
Fairmount City — (814-316-3108)
Free equine assisted activities for Veterans
18. **Butler County Humane Society**
Butler — (878-271-6484)
Free Pets for Vets program.
19. **J and J Farms Animal Sanctuary**
Saxonburg — (412-889-5764)
Volunteer opportunities and event discounts for Veterans.

NUTRITION

20. **Brenckle's Farms and Greenhouses**
Butler — (878-271-6484)
Fresh produce available for purchase at VA seasonal Farmers Markets

LAW

21. **Sechler Law Firm, LLC**
Cranberry Twp — (724-240-3887)
Free educational opportunities and discount for Veterans

hot

TOPICS

Pharmacogenomics Program: Using genetics to find the best treatment

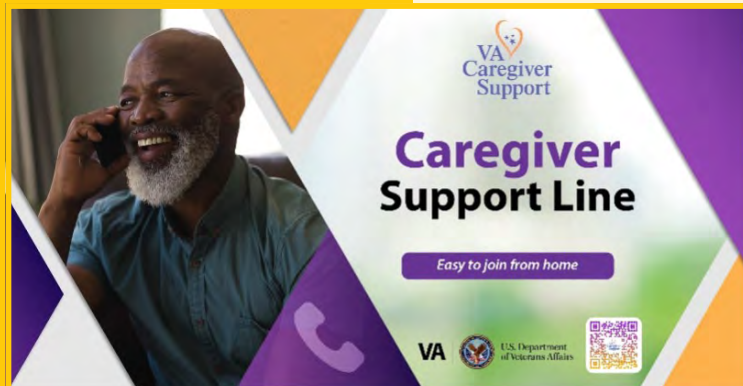
The Department of Veterans Affairs offers genetic testing to current VA health care system patients. The voluntary Pharmacogenomics Testing for Veterans (PHASER) program may help your provider prescribe medications that will work best for you or have fewer side effects. The program looks at your genes to learn how you respond to drugs and only requires a one-time sample of blood. It targets medications prescribed for pain, cholesterol, upset stomach, depression and more. There is no cost to participate in PHASER. To learn more about this program, talk with your primary care team or visit www.cancer.va.gov/phaser.asap.



Veteran Resource Center NOW OPEN!

Make sure to visit the NEW Veteran Resource Center, located on the 2nd floor, room 2ED003, on your next visit to the Abie Abraham VA Health Care Center. There are several public computers that Veterans can use to apply for jobs, check emails in between appointments, download forms, learn how to use and get registered for social media, or create and update resumes. Veterans can also log onto their My HealtheVet account or file a travel claim through these dedicated computer systems located in the center. Limited notary services are available. The resource center is open Monday through Friday from 9am-3pm and has in-person volunteer and staff support to assist you with your needs. For more information call 878-271-6264.

Caregiver Support Line



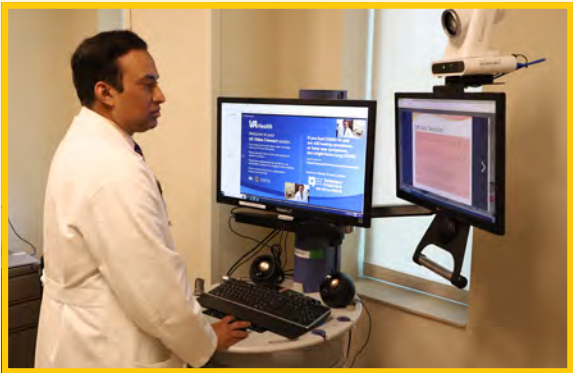
Caregiving isn't easy, but you're not alone. Caring for yourself is the best thing you can do for those that depend on you. VA's Caregiver Support Line is here to help you by offering monthly education group sessions on a range of topics. To join or to learn more go to: <https://www.caregiver.va.gov/support-line/presentations.asp>

TeleCardiology

VA has made great strides in improving access to specialized cardiology care for Veterans residing in rural communities. Through the innovative hub-and-spoke model, Veterans located hundreds of miles away from cardiology specialists gain access to high-complexity cardiovascular care through telehealth. TeleCardiology is a medical modality utilizing telecommunications to provide remote treatment and diagnosis of heart related diseases.

Butler VA implemented TeleCardiology in June 2023 to improve access to care for Veterans residing in the more rural communities of the facility's service area. According to Dr. Aref Rahman, Butler VA Chief of Staff and Interventional Cardiologist, telehealth modalities are helping clinicians to connect patients to vital healthcare services they might otherwise forego through video conference, remote monitoring, and wireless communications. "With the advancement of technology, we are now able to listen to the heart and lungs virtually, saving the patient a trip to the doctor's office ensuring greater efficiency of patient triage and management." Since implementation in 2023, Butler VA has completed 133 TeleCardiology visits.

To learn more, go to <https://telehealth.va.gov/type/clinic> or talk to your VA primary care provider.



Centenarian Recognition Program

The Centenarian Recognition Program was implemented in 2020 under former Secretary of Veteran Affairs (VA) Robert Wilkie and continues through today under VA Secretary Denis McDonough. The program is a special initiative to honor American heroes, Veterans who are or have turned 100 years old. Veterans receive a letter from the Secretary of the VA along with a commemorative coin and receive public recognition from their respective VA facility. Butler VA's Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) implemented the program locally

in 2024. "We wanted to be a part of this special program and recognize our local heroes for their service," comments Amy Tomko Chief of CDCE. To date, Butler VA has presented 2 Centenarian Recognition Awards with several to be presented in the coming months. To be considered, Veterans must be enrolled and receiving care through the VA health care system. For more information or to recommend a Veteran for this award, please call 724-477-5010.

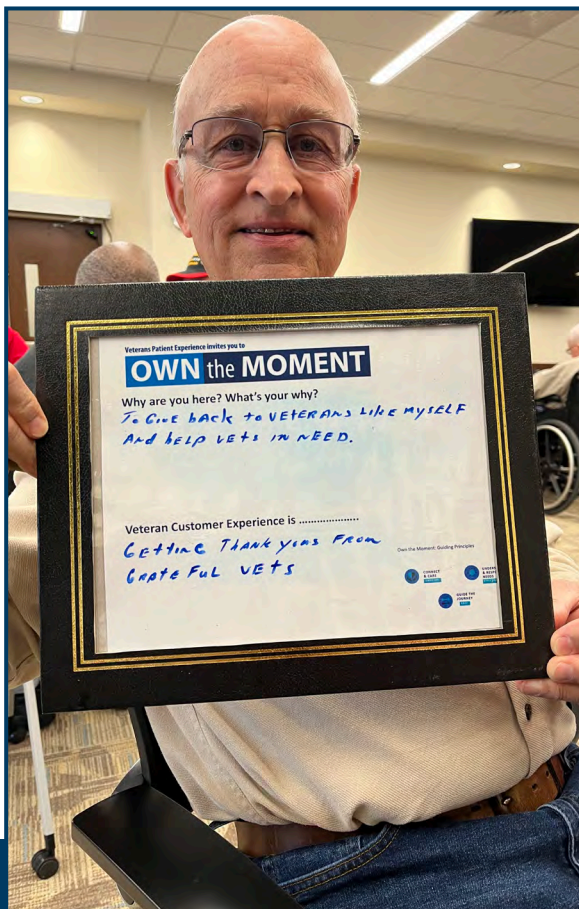
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SHARING
STORIES
AND
NEWS
FROM
VETERANS
TO
VETERANS

Vet Chat

People Care



Butler VA's Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) facilitates opportunities for the community to connect with Veterans and support VA programs and services through a volunteer service program. Volunteers perform a variety of functions ranging from welcoming visitors to the facility to transporting Veterans to their VA appointments.

George LaBancz, Marine Corps Veteran and Purple Heart recipient, not only gets his care through the VA but he also serves as a volunteer driver. George has been transporting Veterans to and from their VA medical appointments since 2021 and has accumulated over 400 hours of service.

"Volunteering at the VA gives me the opportunity to give back to others, like myself, who served our country with pride and dedication. These Veterans have no other means of transportation and need to get to doctors' appointments. Some have no family or friends that can help them, so as a volunteer I can fill that need. It gives me great personal satisfaction to help other Veterans."

Butler VA is currently recruiting volunteer drivers. To learn more about volunteering, contact the CDCE office at 724-477-5010.

VETERANS SERVING VETERANS



Butler VA Program Behavioral Health Secretary, U.S. Army Veteran –
Raymond (Bill) Siggelow

“ As a Veteran, I wanted to become an employee with the VA to assist other Veterans any way I can. I felt like it was a continuation of my service to our fine country by assisting my fellow Veterans. I enjoy interacting and helping any of our Veterans in the facility when I am out and about during my workday.”

Hey Veterans!

Share your stories with us in Vet Chat. Contact the Butler VA Public Affairs Office today at 878-271-6492.

It May be Your Thyroid!

Women Veterans: Have you experienced a significant shift in your weight, mood, energy, temperature tolerance, periods, or skin and hair? It may be your thyroid. About 60% of people with a thyroid condition are unaware, but it's a common issue among women (especially after pregnancy or menopause).

The thyroid gland is a small organ at the front of your neck that produces hormones which play a big role in the way your body functions. The two main types of thyroid disease are:

Hypothyroidism: When your thyroid does not make enough thyroid hormones; also known as an underactive thyroid. This slows down many of your body's functions, like your metabolism

Hyperthyroidism: When your thyroid makes more thyroid hormone than your body needs; also known as overactive thyroid. These speeds up many bodily functions, like your metabolism and heart rate.

When your thyroid doesn't work properly, it can impact your entire body, but proper medication or treatment can help. If you have a family history of thyroid disease, notice a mass or swollen neck, or experience significant changes in your mood, weight, energy, period, temperature tolerance, or hair and skin, it's time to make an appointment.

Speak with your VA health care provider about your symptoms and start taking steps to improve the way you feel. Visit VA Women's Health for more information or call 1-855-829-6636 to get connected to care.

About 60% of people with a thyroid condition are unaware

but it's a common issue among women

HYPOTHYROIDISM
(Underactive Thyroid)

HYPERTHYROIDISM
(Overactive Thyroid)



Who's Who?

**KATIE
MCCULLOUGH AND
J. KIRK RITCHEY**
VA CHAPLAINS



VA Chaplains bring emotional and spiritual support and comfort. They understand the spiritual and moral dilemmas, which often arise from anxieties, problems, and fears that can accompany illness and disabilities. VA Chaplains can provide religious ministry, spiritual care, or emotional support to meet the needs of the whole person during a struggle for health and peace of mind.

VA Chaplains are here to help Veterans discover or strengthen their spiritual identity on their journey through a medical, physical, or mental crisis and can help assess resources for hope and spiritual strength. For those struggling, it helps to find someone safe and trustworthy to talk with, someone who will be non-judgmental.

Appointments with Chaplains are available in person and virtually.

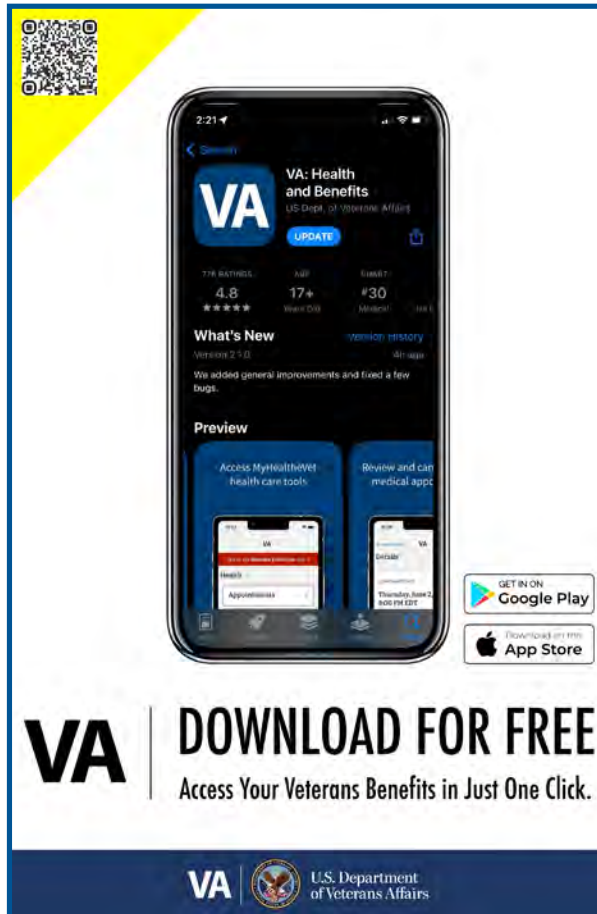
Chaplain Katie McCullough
MDiv, BCC-MH
724-477-5009

Chaplain J. Kirk Ritchey
M.Div., D.Min.
724-285-2253



health
tech
tips
tastes

VA HEALTH & BENEFITS MOBILE APP EXCEEDS 2 MILLION DOWNLOADS



The VA Health and Benefits mobile app is modernizing how Veterans access and manage their health care and benefits information. The app surpassed 2 million downloads—a significant milestone in giving Veterans convenient access to their VA health care and benefits via their mobile devices.

As the app's popularity and use continue to grow, VA's Office of Information and Technology works with users to identify challenges so that VA can make improvements to the features and tools Veterans want such as:

- Quick and direct access to the VA Crisis Line for Veterans and their families
- Management of Health Care Appointments
- View Status of Claims and Appeals
- Read benefit decision letters
- Refill and Track VA Prescriptions
- Secure Message with Your VA Health Care Team
- Download Common VA Letters and Documents
- View VA Vaccine Records
- Locate VA Facilities
- One-touch Proof of Veteran Status
- Access Using Biometric Login

Upcoming 2024 features include health care appointment scheduling and check-ins, travel claim submissions and more.

To learn more or download the app, go to mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-and-benefits.

**Butler VA Virtual Health
Resource Center Hours
of Operation**

Tuesday: 10:00am-12:00pm and Thursday: 1:00pm-3:00pm
(walk-ins are welcomed!)

*Located in Veteran Business Services (adjacent to the main lobby)
at the Abie Abraham VA Health Care Center.*

HEALTH TASTES

Olive Oil Granola



Ingredients

- 3 cups old-fashioned (rolled) oats
- 1 cup chopped raw walnuts
- 1 cup green pumpkin seeds (pepitas)
- 1 cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- ½ cup maple syrup or packed brown sugar
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon or pumpkin pie spice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup dried fruit

Calories: 195 ★ Fat: 12g ★ Carbohydrates: 17g ★ Protein: 5g

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 300°F
2. Combine the oats, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, shredded coconut, maple syrup or brown sugar, olive oil, cinnamon or pumpkin pie spice, and salt.
3. Divide the mixture between 2 rimmed baking sheets and spread in an even layer.
4. Bake until golden-brown and crispy, about 30–45 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes.
5. Transfer the granola to a large bowl.
6. Add the dried fruit (if using). Stir to combine.
7. Once cool, transfer to an air-tight container and store for up to 1 month.

Serving Size: 1/4 cup

Servings: 26

Source: VA Nutrition

Crossword

Across

5. They're usually found in beds
9. Time for showers
10. Gloom's opposite
13. Yellow spring flower
15. Day for diamonds and dreams
17. Shower apparel?
18. Monarch, e.g.

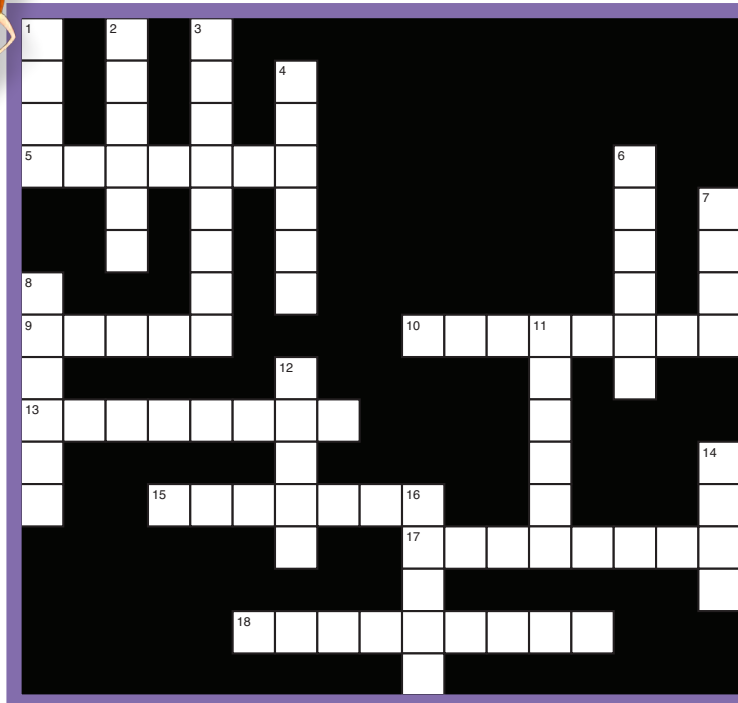
Down

1. Sport with tees
2. Fledgling plant
3. America's pastime
4. ____ egg
6. Eating outing
7. When spring ends
8. Vegetable plot
11. One of four in a year
12. Breezy
14. Flying toy with a tail
16. Verdant



A Brain Boost

Could doing crossword puzzles improve your brain health? Maybe. Research has long suggested brain games to boost brain function at an older age. It's worth a try!



HEALTH tip



HEALTH TIP KEEPING YOUR BACK HEALTHY

Back pain is one of the most common health problems today. Aging and physically demanding occupations and activities, bad posture, lack of movement, and depression are contributing factors to back pain. One of the best ways to reduce back pain is through Pilates. Pilates is a system of mind-body exercises designed to improve physical strength, flexibility, and posture, and enhance mental awareness by restoring balance to the body. Butler VA recently implemented a Pilates for Veterans program every Wednesday. Veterans can learn more about the program by calling 878-271-6459.

Living Better Spring 2024



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Butler VA Health Care System

353 North Duffy Road
Butler, PA 16001
800-362-8262
724-287-4781



 www.va.gov/butler-health-care

 facebook.com/vabutlerpa

 twitter.com/vabutlerpa

**ARMSTRONG COUNTY VA
OUTPATIENT CLINIC**
11 Hilltop Plaza
Kittanning, PA 16201
724-545-8420

**CLARION COUNTY VA
OUTPATIENT CLINIC**
56 Clarion Plaza, Suite 115
Monroe Township, PA 16214
814-226-3900

**CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP VA
OUTPATIENT CLINIC**
900 Commonwealth Drive, Suite 100
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
724-742-3500 or 724-741-3131

**LAWRENCE COUNTY VA
OUTPATIENT CLINIC**
Ridgewood Professional Centre
1750 New Butler Road
New Castle, PA 16101
724-598-6080

**MICHAEL A. MARZANO VA
OUTPATIENT CLINIC**
295 North Kerrwood Drive, Suite 110
Hermitage, PA 16148
724-346-1569

The Butler VA Health Care System, located in Butler County, Pennsylvania has been attending to Veteran's total care since 1947. We are the health care choice for over 22,000 Veterans throughout Western Pennsylvania and parts of Ohio and are a member of VA Healthcare VISN 4 under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The Butler VA provides comprehensive Veteran care including primary, specialty and mental health care – as well as management of chronic conditions and social support services for our nation's finest, America's Veterans.

Refer a Buddy

Know a fellow Veteran not enrolled in VA health care? Tell them about the Butler VA! Now is the time to enroll. Call us at 800-362-8262 to get started today.



The Butler VA wants to bring attention to all Veterans what choices they have, and the full range of health care services and programs they have access to when they Choose VA.

www.choose.va.gov

ARE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW STRUGGLING WITH SUICIDAL THOUGHTS?

Creating a safety plan now can help you identify coping strategies and sources of support in a future crisis. Give suicidal thoughts time to decrease and become more manageable by having a list of:

- ☐ Warning signs that you may be headed toward crisis
- ☐ Ways you can cope on your own
- ☐ Distractions (places to go and people to call)
- ☐ Friends and family to call when you need help
- ☐ Professionals to call when you're in a crisis
- ☐ Ways to limit access to dangerous objects and keep yourself safe

Create a plan with your VA health care team or download the VA Safety Plan app at mobile.va.gov/app/safety-plan.



1-855-VA-WOMEN
www.womenshealth.va.gov

