

VA



**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health
Administration

Northern Arizona VA Health Care System (NAVAHCS)

Stakeholder Update February 2021

Public Health Precautions:

- Veterans attending outpatient appointments are authorized one person/caregiver to accompany them to their appointment.
- No visitors under 18 years of age at any time.
- NAVAHCS is currently not allowing inpatient visitors; visitation is only allowed for hospice and inpatients at end-of-life actively dying as determined by a physician.
- Veterans are required to answer COVID screening questions at entry, wear a mask/facial covering when inside buildings, and practice social distancing.
- When Veterans are checking-in for their appointments, they are required to stand-back 6 feet from the check-in counters and recommended to check-in at kiosks.

COVID-19 Plan (as of 02/05/2021):

- COVID-19 vaccination by priority group began December 22, 2021. NAVAHCS is providing vaccination by appointment only due to the limited supply of vaccine and following established high-risk priority group stratification. Vaccination clinics have been established at Prescott and all CBOC locations throughout Northern Arizona - Cottonwood, Kingman, Lake Havasu, Flagstaff, and Anthem.
- As of 2/04/21, NAVAHCS has administered a total of 4,196 (first and second dose) Moderna vaccines. Staff: 1173 & Veterans: 3,023 (not unique individuals, includes 1st and 2nd doses).
- Next week we will receive an increase in our vaccine allocation, which will allow us to do 2,300 new doses. For now, this is believed to be a one-time increase.
- Starting on Monday, February 8, NAVHACS will begin scheduling Veterans 65 and older.
- Options in order of preference for Veterans to opt-in for scheduling are: through My HealthVet, the VA national site [here](#), or the Prescott COVID vaccine call center at 928-717-7406. If Veterans inquire about scheduling an appointment through another avenue, please redirect them to one of the three options above.
- We began vaccinating our Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC) Veterans the week of February 4th.
- This week our plan to begin vaccinating our homeless population was approved by the Network. We will begin vaccinating in Bullhead City first. Vaccination of homeless veterans utilizing a mobile vaccination plan will begin the week of February 22nd.
- Caregivers in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) will be offered the COVID vaccine at the same time as the Veteran. When our staff call Veterans to schedule their COVID vaccine appointment, if their Caregiver also wishes to receive the vaccine, they will be scheduled their appointment at the same time.
- Continuing Phase 1 for outpatient operations in order to mobilize staff for other COVID healthcare demands. We will continue to see about 25% of patients face-to-face.

- NAVAHCS continues to have a dedicated 15 bed Medicine unit to care for COVID-19 patients only. We have 10 medical/telemetry beds to care for non-COVID patients.
- NAVAHCS does not have an ICU. An ED patient requiring intubation would be put on a ventilator and transferred as soon as possible to a local hospital or another VA. We have implemented Tele-ICU with the Minneapolis VA Medical Center to assist with monitoring of ventilator patients until transfer.

Prosthetics Regulations:

- The Prosthetics Regulation takes effect and VA compliance will be mandatory on February 27, 2021. Federal Register: Prosthetic and Rehabilitative Items and Services
- The purpose of the regulation is to establish eligibility and other criteria for providing items and services under the Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service (PSAS).
- Future PSAS and other VHA directives must adhere to the new Prosthetics Regulations. New Prosthetics Regulation will not affect existing regulations and provisions of the Clothing Allowance Program, Automobile Adaptive Equipment Program, and Home Improvement & Structural Alterations Program.
- The Prosthetics Regulations defined 15 categories of items and services, if VA determines that such items and services has a ***direct and active component of the Veteran's medical treatment and rehabilitation*** and do not solely support the comfort or convenience of the Veteran.”.
- The 15 categories are as follows: (1) adaptive household items, (2) adaptive recreation equipment, (3) cognitive devices, (4) communication devices, (5) home exercise equipment, (6) home medical equipment, (7) home respiratory equipment, (8) implants, (9) mobility aids, (10) orthotic devices, (11) prosthetic devices, (12) repairs for items, (13) replacements for items, (14) specialized clothing made necessary by the wearing of a prosthetic device, and (15) Training with and fitting of prescribed items

Mental Health Clinic Updates:

- Next week NAVAHCS is launching our Behavioral Health Integration Program (BHIP) in the Mental Clinics. A BHIP is a “team approach” to providing care in which the BHIP Team shares in the care of a Veteran. This will help in ensuring access to services when an assigned Provider is not available.

Veteran VA Medical Care Debts

- Veterans should be aware and plan accordingly regarding current Suspension of VA Collection Actions and extension of terms of previous repayment agreements. This was previously scheduled to end on December 31, 2020 but has now been extended due to a recent Executive Order signed by the President on January 22, 2021. There was no end date outlined in the Executive Order.
- VA had stopped sending monthly billing statements for medical care debt starting April 6, 2020. This change followed the President's April 2 announcement that was part of the nation's relief response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, all actions on debts owed to VA in the form of copayments under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Treasury were suspended.
- With the extension of the mandated deferral, VA's initial plans to begin billing Veterans in January 2021 and resume mailing statements has been postponed and there is currently no date for resumption. Veterans are currently not required to make payments until after the VA receives notification of the mandate ending. Veterans may still make payment on outstanding balances if they want and are encouraged to do so if they can to avoid a large lump sum bill when billings resume.

- Although statement have been on hold since April 2020, in November 2020 Veterans were mailed notification which included their current balances and informed billings would resume for any new copay charges for any care or prescriptions from April 6, 2020, through December 31, 2020, and any unpaid copays from before April 2020.

Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC):

- VA's Caregiver Support Program offers support services for caregivers including training, peer mentoring, respite care, a telephone support line, and self-care courses for caregivers of covered Veterans enrolled in VA health care who need personal care services.
- Caregivers can visit [VA Caregiver support website](#) or call the Caregiver Support Line at 855-260-3274 for questions.
- Caregivers who are not eligible for the Program for Comprehensive Assistance to Family Caregivers can still receive support through our General Family Caregiver Program and access similar supportive services such as peer mentoring, a telephone support line, and self-care courses. Caregiver Support staff can also link them to other VA and community resources for support.

Housing Updates for Veterans:

- The Grant and Per Diem Program (GPD) inspections have been approved for the Jerry Ambrose Veterans Council of Mohave County and they are currently accepting referrals to begin placements for their transitional housing program.
- NAVAHCS Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) project has continued its development and the developers are working on completing surveys and obtaining permits to begin the construction process. The EUL will provide housing on the VA campus for an anticipated 70 homeless Veterans. It is estimated to open in early 2023.
- Kingman began housing Veterans at the Villas in December. The project has 48 units set aside for the HUD-VASH Project Based Program. As of January, 16 Veterans have been housed at the Villas with an additional 5 in process.

Flu Shots:

- In addition to being available at NAVAHCS through the PACT teams, eligible Veterans can receive the seasonal flu vaccination through [Community Care Network \(CCN\)](#) in-network retail pharmacies or urgent care locations. This replaces the Walgreens Retail Immunization Care Coordination Program, which ended in March 2020. Flu shots at an in-network retail pharmacy and NAVAHCS are available now. The flu shot at an in-network urgent care location will be available on October 1. These no-cost flu shots are available Sept. 1, 2020, through March 31, 2021, to eligible Veterans. Vaccines are subject to availability and may be in limited supply after March 1, 2021.
- Eligible Veterans do not require a VA referral. Veterans can go to an in-network retail pharmacy or urgent care location, present a valid government-issued identification (e.g. Veterans' Health ID Card, Department of Defense ID card, state-issued driver's license or ID card, etc.) and receive their flu shot. Eligible Veterans can receive a no-cost standard-dose (quadrivalent) or high-dose flu shot. Veterans can locate an in-network retail pharmacy or urgent care location by using the [VA Locator](#).
- Many local retail pharmacies offer flu shots that may be covered by private insurance or programs such as Medicare. There may be a charge for a Veteran's flu shot at these locations. If Veterans do not have insurance, and receive a flu shot at a retail pharmacy that is not in VA's [Community Care Network](#), there will usually be a charge.

Community Care Updates:

- COVID-19 testing and services with dates of service prior to January 1, 2021 that were not authorized (do not have a VA referral) can be submitted to VA for payment. However, claims for reimbursement for COVID-19 testing and services on and after January 1, 2021 must be approved via VA referral or meet urgent or emergent care eligibility requirements in order to receive payment. Claims need to meet all requirements, including timely filing and submitted to the appropriate payer (TriWest or VA). Veterans can call VA Customer Service 877-881-7618 or contact us at ProviderComms@va.gov for any questions.
- After **March 2021**, VA will be handling referrals from start to finish (VA will authorize, schedule, and complete referrals with documents of visits). Until then, VA is handling about 50% of consults from start to finish and TriWest is helping us with scheduling the rest of our consults.
- Veterans have the option of self-scheduling directly with the community provider or utilizing Community Care staff to assist with scheduling appointments.
- TriWest will initially schedule appointments for NAVHACS for the following specialties: Optometry, Ophthalmology, Labs, and imaging studies. Veterans referred to the community for these services will likely get a call from TriWest and are encouraged to add the TriWest number to their cell phone 1-877-226-8749 as a contact. Many people do not answer their phones for 877 numbers that they do not recognize and failure to respond to TriWest calls results in the consult being sent back to VA, causing a delay in care.

NAVAHCS' Events & Activities:

- MLK Day Observance was held on January 19th. NAVAHCS was honored to have Mr. Martin Luther King III speak at our virtual event.
- Mark Godwin, LCSW-PTSD Specialist provided a Veterans' PTSD Wellness and Stress Reduction 1-hour Radio Program that aired on Hopi KUYI Radio and streamed online, on January 15-17, 2021. A collaborative effort made possible with the radio station and Hopi Tribe Vice Chairman, Clark Tenakhongva.
- **February 15th** – President's Day – Clinic Closed. The Emergency Department is open 24/7.
- **February 17th** – Virtual African American History Month Event at 1 p.m. Guest Speaker is Pastor McCaa, Col (Ret).
- We held a Groundbreaking Ceremony last month for our new Warehouse, which will be located near the softball field.
- NAVAHCS Veterans received two large donations from the community last month (specifically to help our homeless population and our Native American Veterans). Donation totals were more than \$15,000.

NAVAHCS News:

- Ms. Lisa Martin, Associate Director retired at the end of January. Mr. Steve Sample, Tucson VA Assistant Director is our Interim Associate Director. He is an Air Force Veteran.
- Dr. Megan Babcock has been appointed our Deputy Chief of Staff. She is a Navy Veteran.
- Ms. Robin Maddox has been appointed our Chief of Organizational Excellence. She is an Air Force Veteran.