

# THE northern

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

## Combating Veteran Homelessness in **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**

### *In This Edition...*

Learn About the  
Veterans Choice Program  
Military Sexual Trauma —  
Offering Hope to Victims

  
VA Northern California  
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

# A Welcome Letter from the Director



Spring is in the air and here at VA Northern California Health Care System we are hopeful of good things to come. Our new expanded inpatient behavioral health unit opened in Sacramento, the new behavioral clinic in Martinez is taking shape and the ER expansion has a roof over it. Redding and Chico have started looking for locations for construction/expansion, we have a newly approved joint venture with David Grant Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base to expand hospital bed capacity and we have submitted four new proposals for expanded rural health capabilities. We were also awarded a \$30 million site prep construction project at Alameda Point. That is a whole lot of good news for VA Northern California Health Care System!

We are hiring 271 new employees this year, and our patient volume has grown 4.3 percent over the first four months. We still have some challenges with wait times, patient and employee satisfaction scores and space demands, and we are addressing those by assigning teams to find ways that we can make improvements. Our challenges with patient satisfaction are being addressed with three major process improvement teams working on better phone processes, improved patient orientation and improved scheduling practices. A fourth process improvement team is working on improved staff satisfaction.

Spring is a time of renewal, sunshine and hope. I feel good about the direction of our health care system in spite of some of our challenges. We have plans to keep getting better as we serve Veterans each and every day.

David Stockwell

*Director, VA Northern California Health Care System*

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### About the Publication

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## JOIN US FOR THE 9TH ANNUAL MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY

Remembering Our Veterans and Honoring the California National Guard. Always Ready, Always There.

Monday, May 25, 2015 | 9:30 a.m. Pre-Program Entertainment | 10:00 a.m. Commemoration Program



Memorial Plaza, Sacramento VA Medical Center | 10535 Hospital Way | Mather, CA 95655 | Call 916-851-8700 for more information.

# Veterans Choice Program



**C**onnecting you to timely and convenient access to health care in your community.

By Tara Ricks, Public Affairs Officer

## About the Program

Many Veterans now have the option of receiving non-VA health care rather than waiting over 30 days for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility.

The new Choice Program covers non-VA care for eligible Veterans enrolled in VA health care.

Veterans are eligible if:

- You have been told by your local VA medical facility that you will need to wait more than 30 days from your preferred date or the date medically determined by your physician.
- Your current residence is more than 40 miles from the closest VA health care facility.
- You need to travel by plane or boat to the VA medical facility closest to your home.

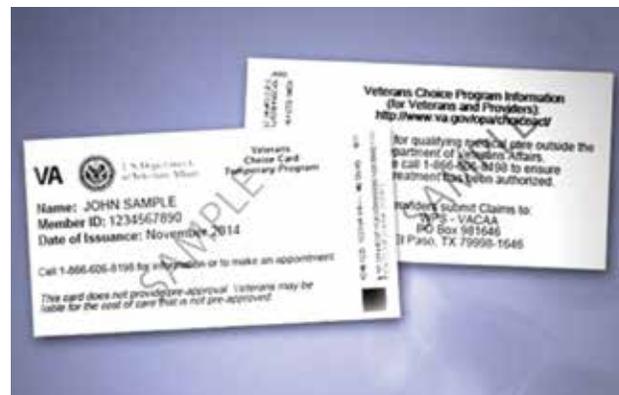
## Steps to Getting an Appointment

1. Decide which non-VA health care provider you would like to use.
2. Make sure you have information on hand about any other health insurance coverage you may have.
3. Call **1-866-606-8198** to make sure you qualify and to schedule an appointment.

When you call, a customer service representative will walk you through the following steps:

- a. You will be asked for your ZIP code and first and last name.
- b. The representative will check to make sure you are eligible for an outside appointment and which of your needs are covered by the VA.
- c. You will be asked for your address and the name of your preferred non-VA provider. Unfortunately, not all providers will be covered. If your preferred provider is not available, we will recommend other providers in your area. We will then work with you to schedule an appointment.

Visit [www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/](http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/)



# COMBATING HO



Story Photo Credits: Mayra O'Neill, Public Affairs Specialist

**I**t's 9:30 a.m. on a Wednesday in early March. It's drizzling, which is a rare treat for the Sacramento Valley these days.

Just outside of Friendship Park, the VA mobile clinic is parked—generator running, awning down, tables and chairs out. Dr. Michael Yanuck steps out and looks around. "The rain must be keeping some folks away," he says. "Last time when we were here there were so many people—it was really eye-opening and pretty shocking."

The mobile unit is run by the VA Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team (H-PACT), a service designed to break down

barriers to medical and housing resources for homeless Veterans. On this day, the clinic has come to a small, shaded park that occupies a small corner of the Loaves & Fishes property near downtown Sacramento, where homeless people can access resources, store their belongings, or just sit and talk.

While the H-PACT team is working to get the clinic up and running for the day, Dr. Yanuck arranges to get a short tour of the park from a service volunteer. Eventually we are joined by Sister Libby, executive director of the organization, and an Air Force Veteran. She and Dr. Yanuck both talk about the work they do with a similar sense of dedication and respect for those they serve. "It's hard being homeless," says Sister Libby. "Whatever it is that gets you here, it's a daily struggle for survival." Dr. Yanuck agrees, "The stories that our patients tell us are very

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***"It's hard being homeless. Whatever it is that gets you here, it's a daily struggle for survival."***

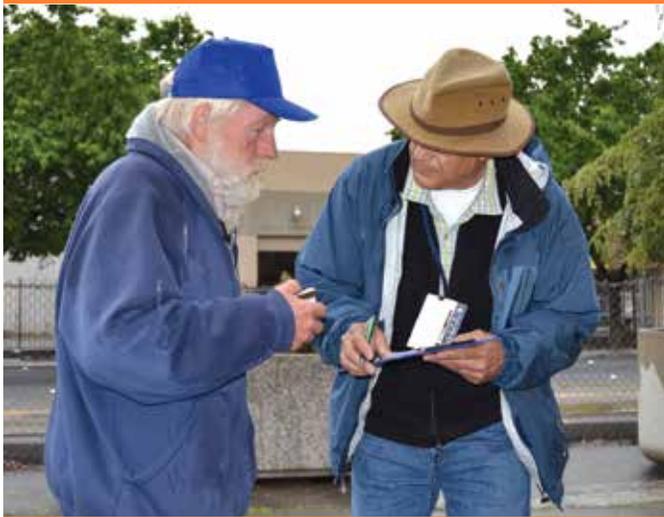
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# MELESSNESS

## at VA Northern California

### Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team (H-PACT)

By Amanda Mina, Public Affairs Specialist



humbling—you can't help but let it affect you." Just then, they both notice someone sitting on a bench and start heading that way.

The person they walk to is Greg, an Army Veteran who enlisted in 1976. He tells us a bit about his military training and his time in the service—and also that he has been homeless for many years.

In early 2012, Greg suffered a foot wound that turned into a case of gangrene. Doctors wanted to amputate the foot—he refused, instead opting to care for it himself using the wound care training he received in the military. The details of his ordeal are too graphic to describe here, but needless to say, it was a very long and painful process.

When Greg first met Dr. Yanuck in February, the gangrene was gone, but the wound still needed some attention. Then there was the matter of the wheelchair that Greg had been confined to for months—he hated it. Dr. Yanuck and Sister Libby both express amazement at the fact that Greg is able to walk with a cane now. "He is very health-conscious and concerned with his well-being," says Sister Libby. "He wasn't going to accept that he couldn't walk anymore." Dr. Yanuck says that Greg is one of the most determined people he has ever met. Greg's eyes shine with resolve. "A wheelchair just wasn't going to work for me," he says. Then he smiles.

Dr. Yanuck and Greg walk back to the mobile clinic, where Greg waits to be seen. Three Veterans are waiting near the door; a clerk is talking to one of them to find out if he needs medical attention, housing resources, or any of the other services the VA offers. Sister Libby smiles and says "People just love having these resources out here—it makes them feel good that other people care, and it's important to care for people no matter what their circumstances may be."

For more information about the Homeless Veterans Initiative, visit [www.northerncalifornia.va.gov/services/homeless/](http://www.northerncalifornia.va.gov/services/homeless/)

# Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

## In Order to Move On, I Needed to Say Something

By Mayra O'Neill and Amanda Mina, Public Affairs Specialists

**T**alking about it makes the difference," says Maurice, a Veteran and volunteer at the Sacramento VA Medical Center. As a young Navy recruit, he joined the military because he wanted to carry on his family's decorated military legacy. Becoming a victim of sexual abuse was not part of the plan.

Maurice's eyes shine with pride when he talks about his family legacy—a long line of artists, doctors and military heroes. But when he talks about his own military experience, his eyes tell a story of pain, strength and hope.

Maurice was about four months into his Navy medical training at hospital corpsman school, and he loved it. But it all changed when two of his peers attacked and raped him. This would not be the only incident, and these two men would not be the only attackers. And then the taunting and harassment began.

Although the details are painful, Maurice summons the strength to say the words because it helps. He was a young kid and he didn't understand why it was happening, but he did not tell anyone. "Back then one could not report such things," he says.

All the same he kept going—finding solace in his work and strength within himself. He left with an honorable discharge and decided to forget about what happened and went on with his life. He was successful all around—smart, talented, worldly and always learning something.

Forty years later he started volunteering at the hospital. "I wanted to volunteer at the VA because I couldn't have a career in the military," said Maurice. "After all, this place is what keeps me alive," he says with an earnest smile. "It's important to me to be here for my brother and sister Veterans. I'm in service for the rest of my life."

He kept seeing posters around the hospital saying "If something happened, tell someone." It troubled him. And then something triggered a flood of traumatic memories. "I started falling apart. I told my doctor what was happening, and, soon after, I was diagnosed with PTSD. Another doctor asked about the memories, and the PTSD was linked with Military Sexual Trauma (MST)."

When he talks about the doctors and the MST program, you can feel his sense of relief. "The program works. After four months, I learned about my triggers and how to cope with them."

"I have confidence in everyone I talk to here. I want to tell my brothers and sisters that talking is the thing that helps. There is no shame—just tell someone. You're worth it."



***"I have confidence in everyone I talk to here. I want to tell my brothers and sisters that talking is the thing that helps. There is no shame—just tell someone. You're worth it."***



# Reach Out For Help— Stay Connected

By Mayra O'Neill and Amanda Mina, Public Affairs Specialists

## Facts About Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

- » *MST refers to sexual assault or repeated, threatening acts of sexual harassment that occurred while in the military; all such behavior is prohibited by military law*
- » *Both women and men can experience MST*
- » *It is possible to recover from trauma*
- » *VA has free services to help you recover*
- » *You do not need to have a VA disability rating; you may be eligible to receive services even if you are not eligible for other VA care*
- » *You do not need to have reported the incident(s) or have documentation that they occurred*
- » *About 75 percent of women and 76 percent of men who were victims of assault do not report their attacks*

For more information on Military Sexual Trauma, go to [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp) or, if you are in a crisis, call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, then press 1.

***“Reach out for help, stay connected, and acquire the tools to get better.”***

**“** *hope that if I talk about my experience, more women will feel like they can too.”*  
*Chantay’s words are purposeful and powerful.*

She joined the military in part to find some escape from her memories of childhood sexual abuse. It quickly became clear that this was not a safe place for her either.

Chantay’s voice resonates with strength now, but it wasn’t always like that. She did not tell anyone that she had been assaulted by an Airman on the way home from a party because she felt too ashamed. Maybe if she hadn’t been drinking... “But when I didn’t talk about it, the thought of it consumed my life.”

Somehow she made it through to the end of her military contract. But once out, she turned to drugs and alcohol in an effort to escape her memories. Everything quickly spiraled out of control, and Chantay, like many other victims of abuse, ended up living on the streets.

There was one hope, and that hope came from within. If there was a way out of this mess, she was determined to find it. That is when she found Women’s Empowerment, a nonprofit organization helping women victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. With their guidance, she set her mind to turning her life around. Step one: quit drugs and alcohol. Step two: deal with what happened.

Then she found the Sacramento Veterans Resource Center and began her healing process by talking about her experiences. “I just lost all desire for drugs and alcohol, and now I have been clean for five years,” she says proudly.

In 2010, she learned about the MST program and has participated in three of the groups offered at the Sacramento VA Medical Center. Her life is coming together. She is working on her master’s degree in marketing, has an internship with Women’s Empowerment and has signed up for a second one. She is also an inspirational speaker. “A lot of women don’t have the support I’ve found to fall back on, so they stay silent. I hope that if I talk about my experience, more women will feel like they can too.”

# Healthy Recipes!

**S**pring has arrived, and warmer weather is here to stay.

Eating healthy and staying active are important ways that Veterans (and everyone else) can manage their health. Enjoy creating and devouring this great recipe from our dietitians!

## Taco Salad with Avocado and Chicken

Hands-on time: 15 minutes; Total time: 15 minutes, Serves 4, Calories: 279

### Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ¾ pound fresh chicken breast strips
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic, chopped
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- Salt and pepper
- 2 15 ½ ounce cans of pinto beans, rinsed
- 1 head of romaine lettuce, torn
- ½ cup cheese (cheddar or queso fresco)
- 1 avocado, sliced
- 1 cup fresh salsa (store bought)
- 1 dollop of sour cream
- Tortilla chips for serving



### Directions

1. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat until hot. Add onion, garlic, cumin, ½ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper and chicken strips; cook and stir 4–6 minutes or until chicken is no longer pink and onion has softened.
2. Add the beans and ¼ cup water and cook, tossing occasionally, until warmed through, 2–3 minutes.
3. Top the lettuce with the chicken and bean mixture, add cheese, avocado, salsa and sour cream. Serve with tortilla chips.



**Yreka Rural Outpatient Clinic**  
101 E Oberlin Road, Yreka  
530-841-8500

**McClellan VA Outpatient Clinic**  
5342 Dudley Blvd, Sacramento  
916-561-7400

**McClellan Dental Clinic**  
5401 Arnold Ave, Sacramento  
916-561-7800

**Fairfield Outpatient Clinic**  
103 Bodin Circle, Travis AFB  
707-437-1800

**Mare Island Outpatient Clinic**  
201 Walnut Ave, Vallejo  
707-562-8200

**Redding VA Outpatient Clinic**  
351 Hartnell Ave, Redding  
530-226-7555

**Chico VA Outpatient Clinic**  
280 Cohasset Road, Chico  
530-879-5000

**Yuba City Outpatient Clinic**  
425 Plumas St, Yuba City  
530-751-4500

**Sacramento VA Medical Center**  
10535 Hospital Way, Mather  
916-843-7000

**Martinez Outpatient Clinic**  
150 Muir Road, Martinez  
925-372-2000

**Oakland Outpatient Clinic**  
2221 MLK Jr Way, Oakland  
510-267-7801

**Oakland Behavioral Health Clinic**  
525 21st St, Oakland  
510-587-3400

