

ACROSS THE ISLANDS

VETERANS HEALTH NEWSLETTER

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PATRIOT DAY

— WE WILL NEVER FORGET —

On September 11, we pause to remember a day 25 years ago, that forever changed our country. Reflecting not only on the nearly 3,000 lives tragically lost but also on the families who continue to carry their memory with strength and grace.

Patriot Day serves as a moment to honor the extraordinary bravery of first responders and service members who ran toward danger with unwavering courage, embodying the resilience and unity that emerged in the aftermath of the attacks.

For many Veterans, the events of 9/11 shaped not only the nation's history but also the course of their own service, inspiring deployments in the years that followed, commitments to missions abroad and at home, and a steadfast dedication to protecting the values our nation holds dear. Their contributions—past and present—continue to define our country's enduring spirit and remind us of the importance of service, sacrifice, and remembrance.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY
U.S. AIR FORCE
ESTABLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 1947

Each year on September 18, we celebrate the birthday of the United States Air Force, honoring the innovation, commitment, and service of the Airmen who have safeguarded our nation's skies for generations. Established in 1947, the Air Force continues its mission of air and space superiority, global reach, and rapid response in support of national security. Today, we recognize Airmen—past and present—whose dedication, skill, and courage ensure the safety of our nation and the strength of our military forces.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Pacific Islands Health Care System

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Advancing Health for Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian Veterans

The VA Pacific Islands Center for Pacific Islanders and Veterans Health recently held its annual retreat in Honolulu. The gathering brought together the center's Veteran Advisory Council and VA researchers for open conversations about the health challenges facing Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans.

Throughout the two-day retreat, presenters shared evidence-based research on conditions that disproportionately affect these Veterans. Participants talked about real-world experiences, community needs and practical ways to improve access to care. The focus remained on fairness and ensuring every Veteran can get the support they need.

This work is especially important for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans, who serve in the U.S. military at nearly six times the rate expected for their share of the population. The retreat wrapped up with a shared commitment to continue pushing for better access, stronger partnerships and culturally-grounded care for the Veterans who have served our nation with pride.

“

Our VA is awesome. The level of care was first class.

*Veteran at the
Windward VA Clinic*

”



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“ I enjoyed my physical
therapy session and look
forward to working with
them again.

Veteran at
Spark M. Matsunaga
Ambulatory Care Clinic

”

MISSION, ASPIRATION, AND PURPOSE DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT: SUICIDE PREVENTION

During Suicide Prevention Month, VA Pacific Islands Health Care System recognizes the dedicated team working every day to support Veterans and strengthen suicide prevention across our Pacific communities.

Led by Suicide Prevention Program Coordinator Justin Fienhold, the VAPIHCS Suicide Prevention Team includes Suicide Prevention Coordinators, Community Engagement Partnership Coordinators, a Peer Specialist, and Program Support Assistants who work together to connect Veterans with the care and support they need. Suicide prevention resources are also available at each of our community-based outpatient clinics throughout the Pacific Islands.

Prevention extends beyond our VA facilities. The team provides VA S.A.V.E. (Spot, Ask, Validate, Encourage) training to community partners and organizations, helping people recognize warning signs, ask about suicide, validate a Veteran's experience, and encourage and expedite access to help. The team also builds partnerships throughout the Pacific, engaging with local government, mayors' offices, congressional offices and community service organizations to strengthen the network of support available to Veterans.

Suicide prevention is everyone's responsibility. By knowing the signs, starting the conversation, and connecting Veterans to help, we can make a difference and save lives.

Veterans Crisis Line: Call 988, then Press 1, or text 838255 for free, confidential, 24/7 support.



Justin Fienhold MHS
Suicide Prevention Coordinator-Supervisor



Each year, on the third Friday in September, our nation pauses to honor the service members who were taken prisoner of war and those still missing in action. This day reminds us of the sacrifices made in defense of our country and reaffirms our commitment to accounting for every missing hero. As we observe National POW/MIA Recognition Day, we stand with their families, remember their courage, and renew our promise to never forget.

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“ Lots of patience and
understanding.
Thank you so much for your
guidance.

Veteran at the Maui
VA Clinic

”

Recovery, Resilience, and Healing

You Are Not Alone - Whole Health Offers Hope, Healing, and Connection

This month, we honor Suicide Awareness and Prevention, and we want every Veteran to know: there is hope, there is help, and you matter. Many Veterans experience moments of deep pain or isolation, but no one has to carry those moments alone. The VA is here to walk beside you - to listen, to support, and to help you rediscover your strength, your purpose, and your brighter path forward.

Whole Health is finding what truly matters to you. Your Mission, Aspiration, and Purpose (MAP) is a powerful protective factor against thoughts of self-harm. The Whole Health approach is built on authentic connection, shared trust, meaningful conversations, and personalized support. It helps address risks, strengthen resilience, and open doors to resources that restore well-being and hope.

Protective Factors That Support Healing and Hope Veterans have shared that the following can make a life-saving difference:

- Access to mental and behavioral health care
- A sense of connectedness and belonging
- Problem-solving and coping skills
- Spirituality and meaning
- Mission or purpose
- Physical health and movement
- Employment and contribution
- Social and emotional well-being

“Whole Health allows me to reflect on my thought processing and has helped me significantly with pain both physically and mentally... I’m thankful and grateful that there is a Whole Health program.” —
A Veteran from Southern Texas



Veterans Crisis Line

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

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“Personnel are always cheerful, and I always leave feeling good about my treatment.”

Veteran at
Kauai VA Clinic

”

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Telehealth Awareness Week is right around the corner, taking place September 20th–26th. This year, we’re excited to highlight the many ways Telehealth supports accessible, high-quality care for our Veterans. Throughout the week, our team will host informational tables at each of our clinics, offering an opportunity for Veterans to learn more about our Telehealth programs and the services available. We look forward to connecting with you and continuing to expand awareness of the vital role Telehealth plays in VA healthcare.



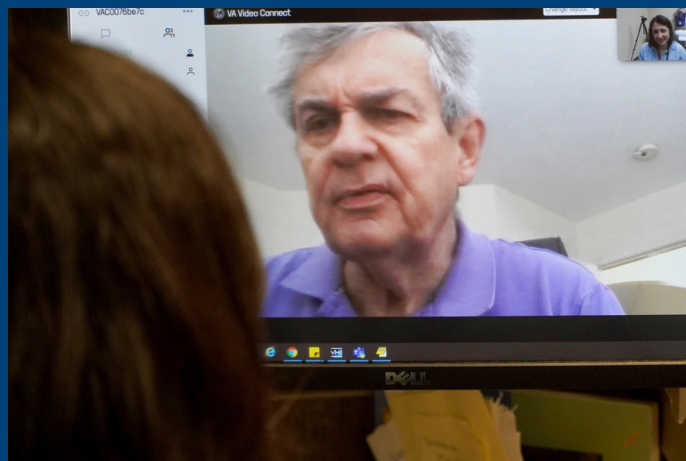
VA Telehealth

Many Veterans are turning to telehealth to access VA healthcare. But for Veterans living in rural areas or for those who have limited access to broadband services or internet-connected devices, VA telehealth might not seem like an option. The digital divide is the gap between people who do and do not have access to the internet and internet-connected devices. This divide prevents many Veterans from receiving telehealth care.

Our goal is to deliver trusted VA care, when and where you need it. That is why the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System is helping Veterans bridge the digital divide with the Digital Divide Consult.

If you or a Veteran you know needs telehealth support due to not having a digital device, a primary care provider can place a Digital Divide consult so a VA social worker can review available options.

Through the Digital Divide Consult, VA Pacific Islands can determine whether a Veteran qualifies for a no-cost, internet-connected tablet to access telehealth. Staff can also help with initial device setup. Learn more at the VA Connected Devices page: <https://telehealth.va.gov/>





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“When I’m finished with
my appointment I’m
feeling better than
when I went in, thank
you. Aloha.”

Veteran at the
Daniel K. Akaka VA Clinic



Thomas A. Steinbrunner, FACHE
VISN 5 - Health Service Area 5.5 Director

This month I had the opportunity to visit our Manila Outpatient Clinic for the first time, where I joined a community outreach event and a Veteran Town Hall in Davao. Meeting with Veterans across the Philippines and learning more about the unique health care operations in Manila was truly meaningful.

I also traveled to the Guam Community Based Outpatient Clinic and met with staff and military partners. The experience underscored just how connected our Pacific communities are.

No matter the distance, we all faced similar challenges during hurricane season. From super typhoons in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, to Kona lows in Hawaii, our facilities and supply teams have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to keep every location safe, operational, and ready.

As we move through the remainder of the year, we know more tropical systems are likely on the horizon. What gives me confidence is the way our teams—and you, our Veterans—continue to come together when it matters most. A recent example was when CloudBreak, one of our community partners supporting Veterans through the HUD-VASH program, lost power for four days. The need was immediate. Our Center for Development and Community Engagement team mobilized quickly, working with community partners to secure essential supplies and significant food donations for Veterans impacted by the outage.

Moments like these remind us why preparation matters. Having a plan isn’t about if a crisis will happen—it’s about being ready when it does. Your resilience, support, and continued involvement help