The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) took a key step in its digital modernization effort recently by revamping its website accessed by 10 million customers per month who use VA’s tools and content online. To improve this experience VA’s Veterans Experience Office and VA Digital Service gathered feedback from more than 5,000 Veterans, service members, their families, caregivers and survivors.

Many customers said they were having a frustrating experience, encountering a complicated collection of websites, forms, log-ins and tools. Through feedback, VA learned that many of them struggled to find what they needed. By listening to Veterans and working across VA organizational boundaries, the new VA.gov website shifts from a “VA as an organization” to a “customer-first” platform. “Veterans, their families, caregivers and our many customers have successful on-line transactions in their day-to-day lives,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie.

“They should expect the same exceptional digital experience when coming to VA. Our customers will receive a more simple and intuitive experience when accessing our on-line front door and the new www.VA.gov.

"The new site contains homepage content that focuses on the top 20 tasks that 80 percent of VA’s customer’s need, the ability to log-in to receive a personalized experience and easy to understand plain language content. Logged in customers will find a dashboard summarizing the current status of services they receive from VA, including those services provided by the Veterans Health Administration. Customers can also update their contact information in one location rather than visiting multiple VA websites or making multiple calls.
Many Americans resolve to improve their health each New Years, but find their efforts slumping by February and March. If we are so motivated to make changes, what keeps us from reaching our goals? Below are a few hints and tips to help keep your health goals on track in 2019.

1) Are you following a fad diet?

If you’re following a restrictive diet with rigid and specific food combinations in order to lose quick weight, you have found the latest “fad diet”. Popular fad diets currently are the keto diet, the intermittent fasting diet, and a variety of “cleanses”. When you hear about a new diet, ask yourself, “Could I eat like this every day?”. If the answer is no, meet with a VA dietitian to see what other nutrition options there are for you.

2) Is your goal achievable?

So how exactly do you plan to “eat better” and “exercise more”? What does that mean to you? Will you eat more vegetables? Choose smaller portions? Drink more water? Make your goal SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound). Eat off of a 9 inch plate (you will save at the grocery store too). Start a walking program by walking four days a week.

3) Do you believe you “need to go extreme” in order to be successful?

Healthy weight loss is 1-2 pounds a week, despite what marketing ads say. While it’s easy to get discouraged with slower progress, take the opportunity to remind yourself about the short term benefits of diet and exercise, such as increased energy and better sleep. Engage in activities that benefit mind and body, such as yoga or hiking.

Your health and wellness will be determined by the behaviors you engage in every day or most days of the week. Make 2019 your year of health by meeting with a VA dietitian at one of the clinics or at the VA hospital (phone appointments available and no referral needed) to set some SMART goals!

For More Information on VA Nutrition services go to: www.lasvegas.va.gov/services/Move_Program.asp
VASNHS Recreational Therapy Programs
PGA Golf Clinic Specialized Equipment
Stand-Up-and-Play Cart helps All Veterans Participate

When U.S. Army Veteran Wendell Foy lines up his golf club to strike the ball, he takes many of the same pre-swing steps that other golfers do. He adjusts his grip on the handle, takes a few practice swings, and sets the ball in front of him. Unlike most golfers, however, his feet never touch the grass. Strapped into an upright harness, this disabled Veteran golfs with a device known as a “Stand-Up-and-Play” paramobile vehicle.

“The Stand-Up-and-Play gets you out on the course and helps you to almost live a normal life,” said Foy. “It gets you into golfing, shooting, bowling…it’s really just an activity vehicle.” The device normally operates as a three-wheeled all-terrain motorized wheelchair, but when it is stationary, allows the operator to elevate to a standing position. While being strapped into the harness for safety, the user can then participate in many activities that were previously inaccessible.

Foy was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis after returning from Iraq in 2006. His gradually-declining mobility has necessitated the use of a wheelchair, leaving him unable to participate in many of his favorite sports and activities. “You know, you’re sitting down so much, but you just want to be like everybody else,” he said. “I would be locked up in a house with nothing to do, depressed.” It wasn’t until Foy joined the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System’s Recreational Therapy program when he began to see other opportunities. “When I got to the VA, they found things for me to do to get involved: golfing and bowling were some of the things that really helped.”

Even though Foy had never golfed prior to his involvement with the VA, the sport, along with the apparatus, has given him new life. “I started getting involved with golf through the VA Recreational Therapy, and they introduced me to the device,” he said. “They told me that if I tried it out and liked it, they would get me one. So [the] Stand-Up-and-Play [Foundation], independent funds, and Heroes in the Rough Foundation all pitched in and paid for the vehicle.”

Foy participates in a weekly professional golf clinic held at the Stallion Mountain Golf Course in Las Vegas. The VA and PGA sponsored program pairs PGA pro instructors with disabled Veterans. While the program has helped Veterans with a wide range of physical and mental impairments, the Stand-Up-and Play apparatus provided a unique opportunity for some of the most experienced instructors. “One of the first things that we do is get the individual in the device. Then you realize just how challenging it is to move it,” said PGA Instructor Craig Stoudnor. “It helps you understand that there is a lack of mobility that we take for granted. It’s more challenging, and you have to be adaptive.”

Stoudnor and the team of VA and PGA instructors have worked with Foy and the other Veterans to develop not only their technique and the equipment necessary to succeed, but also ensure that they have a support system. “Even though somedays you have your bad days, they’re happy to work with you,” he said. “They have improved my confidence and gave me the will to come out and play.”
Pharmacy: Bringing the Specialist to the PACT Team

PACT Pharmacist Provider: Not your Average Pharmacist!

The PACT pharmacist provider is a Clinical Pharmacy Specialist (CPS) who is a core member of your Primary Care healthcare team. The PACT pharmacists are medication experts, who partner with your primary care provider to optimize your medication regimens. They are a Doctor of Pharmacy and have had additional, formal training to provide specialty care. Our PACT pharmacists are located in all of our primary care clinics and at the medical center.

So what can a PACT pharmacist do for you?

PACT pharmacists can prescribe or adjust medications for specific health problems, such as diabetes, high cholesterol, COPD, high blood pressure, or pain management. They monitor labs to make sure your medications work and are safe for you to use. They will look for any drug interactions or side effects, answer medication related questions and help you understand your medications better.

Our PACT pharmacists have been able to help our veterans in many different ways. They have helped patients better control their diabetes, have their blood pressure under control, learn how to properly use their inhalers, decrease the number of medications our veterans take, and lead overall healthier lifestyles.

What is a PACT Clinical Pharmacy Specialist?

- Medication experts on the Primary Care, PACT team, who partner with veterans to optimize their medication regimen.

- PACT Clinical Pharmacy Specialists have their Doctor of Pharmacy and have had additional, formal training to provide specialty care.

What can a PACT Clinical Pharmacist Specialist Do for Me?

- Provide medication management upon referral.
- Prescribe or adjust medications for specific health problems such as:
  - Diabetes
  - High blood pressure
  - High cholesterol
  - Heart Failure
  - COPD / Asthma
  - Tobacco Cessation
  - Pain management
  - And More!
- Monitor labs to make sure your medicines are safe and effective.
- Monitor for drug interactions and side effects.
- Answer medication related questions.
- If recently hospitalized, help provide understanding for medication changes and to assist in making any additional changes, if needed, to keep you from needing to be hospitalized again.
PACT pharmacists can see you in person at whichever clinic is closest to you or they can call you on the phone to assist you with your medications. Many of our Veterans prefer telephone calls so they can be by their medications when they talk to the pharmacist.

**Sounds great! How do I get in touch with a PACT pharmacist?**

Referrals are not required to get an appointment with a PACT pharmacist. You can call 702-791-9024 and let them know you would like an appointment with a PACT pharmacist. You can also let your doctor know at your next visit that you would like to talk to a pharmacist and they can make sure an appointment is made for you before you leave the clinic for the day.

For more information go to VA National website: [www.patientcare.va.gov/primarycare/PACT.asp](http://www.patientcare.va.gov/primarycare/PACT.asp)

Or the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System website: [www.lasvegas.va.gov/services/PACT.asp](http://www.lasvegas.va.gov/services/PACT.asp)
VA Innovation: VA and DOD Partnership for Veterans

Comprehensive Cochlear implant services for Veterans

VA Southern Nevada is now partnering with the Department of Defense to provide comprehensive cochlear implant services for Veterans. Through this partnership, patients who qualify for the device receive their pre-procedural consultations, post-operative follow-up care, and programming with an Audiologist at the VA Medical Center, while the operation is performed by an Ear Nose and Throat Specialist/Otolaryngologist at the Mike O’Callaghan Military Medical Center on Nellis Air Force Base.

Cochlear implants are the only audiological specialty within the VA that requires approval by the VHA Cochlear Implant Advisory Board. VASNHS Audiologist Dr. Jemila Fairley had cochlear implant expertise, but the VASNHS Medical Center was not yet approved to provide cochlear implant programming or surgical services locally. Thus, all local Veterans had to travel to Long Beach VA Hospital for all cochlear implant related services.

All of this changed after the VASNHS applied to become an official programming center and was approved on Sept. 8, 2017. In an effort to create a holistic team approach, Dr. Anna Tsai, Otolaryngologist at Nellis AFB, agreed to perform the medical consultations and surgical procedures at their facility as part of our Joint Venture. With the Advisory Board’s blessing to move the first suitable candidate was selected and implanted locally.

Within the first year, Dolan will meet with Dr. Fairley for six to eight mapping sessions. “At their initial activation we have them listen for soft sounds called threshold levels and we try to create a dynamic range to allow them to hear a variety of speech and environmental sound,” Dr. Fairley said. “As they become more experienced listeners, their results were way different from day one to day three and or six months post-

Timothy Dolan is the first recipient of a cochlear implant thanks to this partnership. While he had been wearing standard hearing aids for several years, Dolan was open to trying a new option. “I’ve been gradually losing my hearing all my life,” Dolan said. “But it has been really bad over the last two years.” In December 2017, Dr. Fairley and Dr. Anna Tsai, Nellis Air Force Base ENT Specialist, suggested the option of a cochlear implant. After months of consultations and pre-procedural appointments, the 69-year-old Army Veteran underwent cochlear implant surgery on Sept. 6, 2018 at Nellis AFB, and the device was activated Oct. 10, 2018. The installation of the internal implant is only a small part of the process, as the device itself must be fine-tuned over several months through a process called “mapping or programming.”

“As soon as it was turned on, all I could hear was noise, and I thought to myself, ‘oh no, what have I done.’ It sounded like a really bad mariachi band.” Dolan said. “But before we were done with the programing on that first day, I already felt like it was getting better. And every day since then, it has gotten better and better. And this mapping is really helping a lot.”
surgery. Once they have used the implant for a while, they are better able to discern threshold levels and comfortably loud level and we have to adjust the device to accommodate that, and that’s why we have to see them so often in the beginning. Those levels change so much as the swelling goes down and the healing begins following surgery.”

A cochlear implant is an electronic medical device that replaces the function of the damaged inner ear. Unlike hearing aids, which make sounds louder, cochlear implants do the work of damaged parts of the inner ear (cochlea) to provide sound signals to the brain. The apparatus consists of two components: the external speech processor unit and the internal implant itself, which is surgically placed by an ENT Specialist.

The sound processor, worn behind the ear, on the head alone or on the body, captures sound and turns it into digital code. The sound processor has a battery that powers the entire system. The implant converts the digitally-coded sound into electrical impulses and sends them along the electrode array placed in the cochlea. The implant’s electrodes stimulate the cochlea’s hearing nerve, which then sends the impulses to the brain where they are interpreted as sound.

Cochlear implant technology has improved drastically over the last 10 years. While the implant itself remains installed internally, new speech processor units can be utilized or upgraded as we would do with our cell phones. Dolan is wearing the Nucleus 7, a unit that allows him to connect directly to his phone, TV, or computer using Bluetooth technology. “I’m streaming everything already,” Dolan said. “It’s awesome!”

While Dolan had some initial apprehension about undergoing surgery, he said that the care provided by both Dr. Tsai and Dr. Fairley has helped to ease his mind. “I am very happy with the results, and very encouraged by the improvements that are being made,” Dolan said. Now with his cochlear implants, he can finally experience the one thing that he hasn’t been able to truly enjoy for years: music. “Music has been a big part of my life, and it had gone away,” Dolan said. “I could hear some music, but a lot of it was just noise. I used to have to mute my hearing aids or put on earmuffs because the music was so unbearably loud. I don’t have to do that with the cochlear implants.”

Since Dolan’s successful surgery, the partnership has performed the procedure and more evaluations on several Veterans. With the Air Force performing the surgical treatment and the VA providing pre- and post-operative consultation and mapping, more Veterans in Southern Nevada are experiencing an improved quality of life and better hearing.

For more information about the program, visit www.lasvegas.va.gov/services/Audiology.asp or call VASNHS Audiology (702) 791-9059

Upcoming Events Jan-March 2019 (Go to www.lasvegas.va.gov for current dates & times)

1-31 Jan - VA NCP "Be Involved in Your Health" Month
18 Jan - Blood Drive @ VASNHS Medical Center Auditorium
21 Jan - Federal Holiday: Martin Luther King Jr. Day
1-28 Feb - African-American History Month/American Heart Month
2 Feb - VECB Transition Fair/ VASNHS Quarterly Town Hall - VAMC
11 -15 Feb - National Salute to Veteran Patients Week
18 Feb - Federal Holiday: Presidents Day
1-31 March - Women’s History Month/National Colorectal Awareness Week
1-7 March - Air Force Wounded Warrior Game Trials @ Nellis AFB
23-29 March - LGBT Health Awareness Week

If you are a Veteran enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system, the Veteran Appointment Request mobile application (app) allows you to self-schedule or request primary care appointments and request mental health appointments. You can also view appointment details, track the status of requests, send messages about the requested appointments and get notifications about appointments and cancel appointments.

For directions go to: https://mobile.va.gov/appstore/veterans
Changing Behavior for Better Health

The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System “To The Point Newsletter” was designed to give Veterans, families and stakeholders information on the programs, services and the knowledge to better educate them of whole-health approaches to wellness.

Together with a Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT), each Veteran works together with health care professionals to plan for whole-person care and life-long health and wellness. The Veteran is the focal point at the center of the health team so he or she can make informed decisions about their health care plan with the provider, nursing, nutrition, mental health, and services in the VA and local community.

FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION IN THE VA SOUTHERN NEVADA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING WEB LINKS:

VASNHS Website
Free Email Alerts

Scan Here to Sign-up!

VASNHS YouTube

Scan Here for videos!

Special Events
VA Quarterly Town Hall & VCEB Transition Service Fair

The SNVCEB Transition Service Fair will include information tables, as well as other displays and information for Veterans, their families and caregivers. The Department of Veterans Affairs will hold its quarterly Veterans Town Hall Feb 2, 2019, which includes the moderated Town Hall from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. and the Transition Service Fair from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The Town Hall will include updates from Veterans Health Care and Veterans Benefits leaders on national and local activities and initiatives, followed by a question and answer session where leaders will answer pre-submitted questions or questions of general interest submitted on a comment card during the session.

Veterans can submit questions in advance to: vhalaspao@va.gov

Questions of a personal nature or those unable to be addressed during the town hall will be sent to the appropriate representative for a direct response back to the submitter.

(Note: Listing of participating non-government organizations is for informational purposes only and does not infer or imply endorsement by the Department of Veterans Affairs)