VA will be implementing two new policies eliminating smoking on the grounds of health care facilities by patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors, vendors and employees begin Oct 1. These new policies allow VA to ensure the health and wellness of patients, VA staff and the public.

“We are not alone in recognizing the importance of creating a smoke-free campus,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “As of 2014, 4,000 health care facilities and four national health care systems in the U.S. have implemented smoke-free grounds.”

The new smoke-free policy applies to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, any other combustion of tobacco, and e-cigarettes, vape pens and e-cigars. VA has collaborated with key stakeholders to update and recertify the policy to be consistent with VA’s commitment to Veterans and the community. There is overwhelming evidence that smoking, and exposure to second-hand smoke, creates significant medical risks, as well as a growing body of evidence that exposure to third-hand smoke creates additional risks to safety and direct patient care.

VA has extensive resources and programs to assist Veterans and employees in their smoke-free journey.

For More Information go to: [https://www.va.gov/health/smokefree/](https://www.va.gov/health/smokefree/) [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/]
Mark Christianson served as a Green Beret in the U.S. Army and retired in 1991 with over 20 years of service. After a surgery to remove a tumor from his spinal cord left him with incomplete paralysis, Christianson has dedicated himself to recovery. One of his biggest goals is to walk again. For several years, he has worked extensively with VA spinal doctors and physical therapists to test the newest technological devices.

Christianson’s efforts have taken him to VA hospitals across the southwestern United States. While working with physical therapists in Palo Alto, California in March 2019, Christianson finally discovered the device that he believes meets his needs better than any previous device: the Indego powered exoskeleton system. The Indego exoskeleton is a modular (only five pieces), lightweight (26 pounds), and user-friendly system that can be easily assembled, disassembled, and transported. The user also has the ability to manually program the amount of effort exerted by the powered system, allowing Veterans like Christianson who have partial paralysis to strengthen muscles with robotic assistance.

In order to qualify for the Indego system, a Veteran must receive 30-40 hours of training with the device under the supervision of an Indego instructor and VA physical therapists. As the training is often physically-taxing for the Veterans, each session is usually an hour, and only conducted twice a day at one of the training hub facilities. Katie Addis is a training instructor for Indego and has been working with Christianson since his first session in Palo Alto. “He’s positive, driven...like nothing is going to stop him,” Addis said of Christianson.

“He is just amazing. He is extremely grateful and eager and he’s doing really great. Right away he did well with the device, and in the multiple sessions, he has made significant improvements from one session to the next.” Palo Alto VA was selected as one of the first training hubs for the Indego system.

The only problem for Christianson was that he and his wife live in Las Vegas, Nevada. After long trips back and forth from California, sleeping in hotels, and not being able to see his therapists at VASNHS, he had developed a close relationship with, Christianson suggested that the North Las Vegas Medical Center could become an Indego-certified facility so that he and other Veterans could do their training there. Thanks to his efforts, along with the VASNHS physical therapy team, that is happening.
“This changes the dynamic for Las Vegas as far as being able to treat and expand the capability of treatment for our paraplegic patients that are here,” said Christianson. “Before this point in time, for a Veteran to go back and forth to the hub, the average cost to the VA was eight to ten thousand dollars per day. Here, they are close to home, they are able to have the support of family members with them, as well as the doctors and therapists who will be treating them after they receive the equipment here in Las Vegas.”

In making VASNHS a qualified training facility, Indego instructors would be working shoulder-to-shoulder with VASNHS physical therapists, giving them hands-on training with the device before showing them how to properly conduct trials with Veterans. Mark Mabida, VASNHS physical therapist, is one of those who has been working closely with Christianson with other similar devices. “This is my first time working with the Indego system, but not my first time seeing it,” Mabida said. “We expressed a lot of interest in working with the system, but we were just waiting to get the approval for the opportunity as a spoke site.”

In order to understand the challenges of using the Indego for the first time, the VA physical therapists tried the device on for themselves. It’s this dedication and empathy that helps the physical therapists to understand what these Veterans are going through when they stand and walk for the first time in years.

“These guys have been through so much, both on active duty and when they’ve come home,” Madiba said. “These injuries can be a life-changer, and instead of living out their retirement happily, the tables have been turned. But I think the possibility of actually getting up and walking again and seeing eye-to-eye with other people is such a privilege that has not existed in the past. As a therapist, it’s a great honor to be a part of that.”

“It’s a team effort,” Christianson said. “We have doctors who are spinal cord surgeons. There are the physical therapists that are specifically trained to deal with spinal cord injuries, as well as the assistants.

I could not ask for better treatment and a better care team than what I have received here. It’s a breath of fresh air.” Thanks to the combined efforts of Christianson, Indego instructors, and VASNHS physical therapists, VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System is now a training site for the Indego powered exoskeleton system.

Physical Therapists at VASNHS “For me it’s a life changer,” Christianson said. “All the effort that I put in initially to make sure that the program came over and was implemented here, now I get to see the fruits of my labor lived out through my fellow Veterans who are going to be here and be able to participate in this program. It’s going to change lives and it’s going to be done locally rather than off in California.

In years past, Veterans living with paralysis, could only dream of walking again. With powered exoskeletons like the Indego system, the determination of Veterans like Christianson, and the dedication of trained VASNHS staff, this dream is becoming a reality right here in Southern Nevada.

For More Information go to:

www.indego.com/indego/en/home
On Sept 26, it was announced that the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System joins a premier group of organizations that have received Pathway to Excellence® designation from the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC).

As the first medical facility in southern Nevada and first VA health care facility in the southwestern United States to earn this recognition, the Pathway designation is a global credential that highlights the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System’s commitment to creating a healthy work environment where nurses feel empowered and valued. VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System’s nurses are an integral part of the health care team, with a voice in policy and practice. Pathway nurses are engaged, resulting in higher job satisfaction, reduced turnover, improved safety and better patient outcomes.

As a Pathway organization, VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System leads the effort to enhance quality of care, patient and nursing safety and the future of health care delivery. “I am so proud of our nurses and all that they do every day for one another and our Veterans locally,” said Dr. Jennifer Strawn, VASNHS’ Associate Director of Patient Care Services and Nurse Executive. They make the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System a great place to work, and the Pathway designation is a testament to their efforts in creating an environment that fosters teamwork and ensures we provide high-quality care.”

"HEI" Award Designation for 3rd Year in Row

Southern Nevada Healthcare System announced their “LGBTQ Health Care Equality Leader” designation from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC). The designation was awarded in the 12th edition of HRC’s Healthcare Equality Index (HEI), released today. A record 680 health care facilities actively participated in the HEI 2019 survey, with HRC Foundation proactively researching key policies at 1,000 additional non-participating hospitals.

Of those included in the HEI, 406 earned a “LGBTQ Health Care Equality Leader” designation. This is the third year in a row that VASNHS has earned this honor, and this year it is the only facility in Nevada to earn the distinction. “At VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, we pride ourselves on being at the forefront of quality health care for our LGBTQ Veterans,” said VASNHS Director and CEO William Caron. “It’s an honor to be counted among the best in the nation, and we will continue to strive to meet the growing needs of this valuable demographic of our Veteran population.”

The 12th edition of the HEI assesses participants on four criteria: Non-Discrimination and Staff Training, Patient Services and Support, Employee Benefits and Policies and Patient and Community Engagement.

In the 2019 report, an impressive 406 facilities earned HRC’s “LGBTQ Health Care Equality Leader” designation, receiving the maximum score in each section and earning an overall score of 100. Another 148 facilities earned the “Top Performer” designation for scoring from 80 to 95 points. With 81% of participating facilities scoring 80 points or more, health care facilities are demonstrating concretely that they are going beyond the basics when it comes to adopting policies and practices in LGBTQ care.
You protected and defended your country. Now it’s time to protect and defend yourself and your loved ones against the flu. Did you know anyone can get the flu? Studies show that getting a flu shot can reduce illness and death from the flu. Get a flu shot and practice healthy habits like getting enough sleep and exercise, eating a balanced diet and drinking plenty of fluids to stay healthy. Locally at the VA within the Las Vegas Valley and Pahrump, Veterans can get their flu shots during any scheduled appointment or by visiting the patient aligned care team (PACT) at their local VA clinic during regular business hours. VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System will also host a large flu clinic to provide shots to Veterans and employees at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center Auditorium, located at 6900 N. Pecos Road, N. Las Vegas, on the following dates and times:

**Oct 5** (Saturday) 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.  **Oct 10** (Thursday) 6:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

**Oct 6** (Sunday) 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.  **Oct 11** (Friday) 6:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

**Oct 7** (Monday) 6:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.  **Oct 15** (Tuesday) 6:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

**Oct 8** (Tuesday) 6:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.  **Oct 16** (Wednesday) 6:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

**Oct 9** (Wednesday) 6:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

After October 16, flu shots for Veterans and employees will be available at the VAMC in the Occupational Health Clinic on the first floor 1B-158, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 3 p.m. and also all VASNHS Specialty Care/Primary Care Clinics.

In addition to receiving flu shots at the VA, enrolled Veterans can also get regular flu vaccinations via a VA partnership with Walgreens through March 31. Veterans using this option should tell their Walgreens health care professional that they are a Veteran patient enrolled in the VA health care system, and show their VA ID card, along with a second form of photo ID. For store locations and hours, go to [www.Walgreens.com](http://www.Walgreens.com) and select Store Locator. **(NOTE: Quadrivalent flu shots are the only immunization covered by the VA under this partnership. Veterans who need a high dosage flu vaccination should visit their nearest VA facility.)**

**Flu Facts**

- The flu vaccine will not give you the flu.
- The flu is caused by a virus.
- It can’t be treated with antibiotics.
- The flu can be life-threatening, specially for people in high-risk groups. This includes the very young, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems. Approximately 36,000 people die of complications from the flu each year.
- Influenza is not the same as “stomach flu,” the 24-hour bug that causes vomiting and diarrhea. This is most likely due to a GI (gastrointestinal) infection — not the flu.
Veteran Spotlight Story: Veteran Joseph Curran

Veterans Support Each Other Through Amputee Exercise Support Group

When Joseph Curran coaches his fellow Veterans in the gym, his intensity can rival that of some football coaches. “C’mon, you’ve got this!” Curran barks at Ramiro “R.J.” Garcia as he struggles to finish his last rep on the leg press machine. Garcia pushes through gritted teeth as he lowers the weight, balancing it between his good leg and his prosthetic. “There you go!” says Curran, congratulating Garcia for finishing his set.

The two U.S. Army Veterans are members of an amputee exercise and support group that meets at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System Kinesiology department each Friday. Due to their boisterous conversations and intense workouts, the Veterans have gained quite the reputation.

“They took on the name ‘Ass-kickers’ because they are the group known at the VA for making a lot of noise,” said Jessica Blackwell, VASNHS amputee-care specialist in Kinesiotherapy. “Everyone knows when we’re around. They’re a great group of guys, but they mean business. They’ve come to work hard, and that’s how they got the name.”

Blackwell founded the exercise and support group two years ago as a way for amputee Veterans to stay physically active and meet others in the same situation. But over time, they have become something closer to a family. “They bonded right away,” Blackwell said. “They’ve never had any kind of social group or anywhere they could go to talk about their problems or what they were going, so having this where they can see each other every week and have something to look forward to has been great.”

At the center of this group is Curran. “Joe is our ringleader,” Blackwell said. “He’s our loudest one, but he takes care of the other guys, making sure that they have the resources they need... he’s actually helping himself in the process.” Curran relishes his role within the group. “What I do is put a little fire under their butts,” the double amputee said. “These guys in wheelchairs, they won’t get out unless I start pushing them. And I only do it to motivate them, out of respect.”

One of the reasons Curran is able to motivate the Veterans, besides his outspoken nature, is that he literally walks-the-walk. After losing both legs from complications, which he attributes to exposure to Agent Orange, VA specialists have helped him to get back on his feet. “First they taught me how to walk on one foot with a walker; how to hobble along. Now I can just walk with a cane. I try to stay out of the chair as much as possible.”

This determination been contagious within the group, and word of mouth has expanded it from two Veterans at the first meeting to more than 25 in current sessions. While their Friday clinics officially consist of an hour-long workout, the group often meets up outside of the Medical Center for bowling, golf and other social events. “Before this was created, our guys didn’t really have a reason to put their leg on and go outside,” Blackwell said. “They told me that they would stay at home and sit in their wheelchairs. This has really given them motivation and a sense of community.” Both physically and mentally, the “Ass-kickers” are saving lives.

“I’ve really seen a great turn around with my guys since we started this group,” Blackwell said. “Their health, their psyche, their mood...I’ve seen a lot of improvements.” “I’ve got a theory,” Curran added. “The average American Veteran in a wheelchair is 200 pounds overweight. They’re home bound and often depressed. They’ll live longer if I can get them out of that chair. So that’s my plan: get the Veteran off his butt and move!”
VASNHS Goes PINK: Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Join VASNHS in October to Bring Awareness about Breast Cancer

VASNHS treated more than 6,400 woman Veteran patients in fiscal 2019 (as of August), an increase of seven percent over last year. Women's health care has never been more needed. The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System Women’s Health Center has coordinated new care efforts to women Veterans of Southern Nevada to include the early detection of breast cancer.

According to Veterans Affairs, one in eight women may develop breast cancer in her lifetime. Men may develop breast cancer, but is not as common with only one percent reported of all breast cancers in the U.S. associated with men. The main factors that can influence the chance of breast cancer include, women over the age of 50, breast cancer genes BRCA1 and BRCA2 changes, and family health histories of breast cancer. It is recommended that women have early detection examinations from the age of 50 to 74 every two years.

Women Veterans are encouraged to speak with their primary care provider or the Women Health Center about getting a breast cancer screening. The type of exam varies according to age, genetic, lifestyle and other risk factors. Primary Care providers recommend routine exercise, minimizing alcohol intake, smoking cessation, and increase intake of anti-inflammatory foods to help metabolize the estrogen pathways. When breast cancers are detected in their very early stage, when they still have not triggered any symptom, chances of a successful treatment are much higher. According to Veteran Health Administration research overall five-year survival rate of breast cancer is 89.7 percent, but if detected early enough—while the cancer is still localized in the breast—the rate of survival increases to nearly 99 percent.

Early cancers are likely to be smaller in size and not spread beyond the breast. Women Veterans in their 20s and 30s should have a health exam every year and the clinical breast exam (CBE) every three years. During the CBE, the health care provider checks manually and visually the breasts, underarms and collarbone areas for abnormalities or warning signs. An experienced professional may detect suspicious areas overlooked by the patient. Women Veterans age 40 or older should have a health exam and a CBE every year, and a mammogram yearly or every other year depending on risk factors.

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

1 - 31 Oct - Breast Cancer Awareness Month/ Pearl The Fire Truck
4 Oct - 2019 Retiree Appreciation Day - Nellis AFB
14 Oct - Federal Holiday: Columbus Day
13 Oct - US Navy Birthday
18 - 19 Oct - At EASE Free Legal Assistance to Veterans - VAMC
30 Oct - VASNHS Quarterly Town Hall - VAMC
9 Nov - 2019 VASNHS BBQ & Car Show - VAMC
10 Nov - US Marine Corps Birthday
11 Nov - Federal Holiday: Veterans Day / Veterans Day Parade-Las Vegas
16 - 17 Nov - Aviation Nation 2019 - Nellis AFB

VEText Message: Appointment Reminders - NEW FEATURE ALERT!
This feature is called Open Slot Management (OSM). Veterans will automatically receive these text message as long they have not opted out of the VEText program. This feature allows Veterans to reschedule their appointment for an earlier available appointment, this includes consults! By using the prompts provided in the message, the Veteran can either reschedule or keep their current appointment. If the Veteran chooses to reschedule their current appointment, VEText will book/schedule the Veteran into the earlier slot and cancel the previously scheduled appointment. We can initiate this feature by service or by individual clinic, customize the features and can based on the particular need of each service or clinic.
If you would like more information, please contact Kimberly Lake at kimberly.lake@va.gov.
Changing Behavior for Better Health

The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System “To The Point Newsletter” was designed to give Veterans, families, caregivers, 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 healthcare 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.

Special Events

**VASNHS Veterans Town Hall & 2019 Veterans Day Event**

**VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System**

**Veterans Town Hall**

When: Wed Oct 30, 2019 /4 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.
Where: VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System Medical Center 6900 N. Pecos Road North Las Vegas, NV 89086

**Background:**
The Resource Fair will include information tables, as well as other displays and information for Active Duty, Reservists, Veterans, their families and caregivers. The Department of Veterans Affairs will hold its quarterly **Veterans Town Hall Oct 30, 2019**, which includes the moderated Town Hall from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 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.

**When:** Saturday, Nov 9, 2019 /10 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
**Where:** VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System Medical Center 6900 N. Pecos Road North Las Vegas, NV 89086

**Background:**
The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System will be hosting the 2018 Veterans Day Celebration at the VA Medical Center. There will be a free BBQ, courtesy of the Masonic Service Association, as well as a Car Show, sponsored by the Las Vegas Cruisin’ Association and much more. Our staff members will be available for a VA Health and Service Fair throughout the day. It’s going to be a great day and everyone is welcome.