



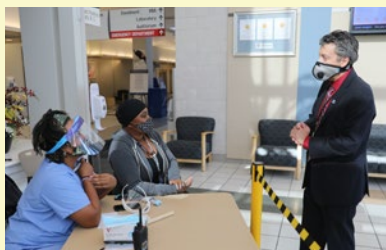
U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

To The Point

VASNHS Newsletter

Summer 2020

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VASNHS Moving Forward

Phased Re-opening of Services includes COVID-19 Protocols

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) is leading the way in reintroducing numerous health care services both nationally and locally as Nevada starts reopening after coronavirus-related shutdowns. The facility began expanding in-person services and procedures May 22. As one of the first sites nationally to return to in-person care, VASNHS is using a phased approach while ensuring a safe environment.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has developed a risk-based framework to prioritize non-urgent procedures, in addition to the urgent procedures currently being performed. Evaluation of factors such as patient health, staff safety, and resource considerations are guiding expansions and scheduling decisions. Rigorous safety measures including employee and Veteran COVID-19 screening, physical distancing, and appropriate personal protective attire such as face coverings and frequent disinfection of high-touch services will remain in place at all VHA facilities.

Veterans coming to a VASNHS facilities for an appointment should be aware of the following:

- Veterans should arrive at facility screening areas **no earlier than 15 minutes prior to their scheduled appointment time.** If Veterans arrive sooner, they will be asked to wait in their vehicle.
- A no visitor policy is still in effect, meaning the additional visitors will not be permitted to accompany a Veteran to an outpatient appointment unless they are directly assisting or caring for the Veteran during his or her time in the clinic. Additionally, no children under 18 are currently allowed in VASNHS facilities.
- Anyone entering VASNHS facilities will be screened. Screening includes answering some health-related questions and taking each person's temperature. If it is determined an individual is experiencing a health issue that needs to be addressed immediately, they will be escorted to another location for further evaluation.
- Staff, Veterans' and any approved visitors are required to wear a mask or other face covering at all times while in VASNHS facilities.
- Veterans and approved visitors are asked to practice physical distancing in all interactions within our facilities. Waiting areas have been reconfigured with fewer chairs spaced further apart to support physical distancing practices in compliance with CDC guidelines.
- Additionally, to manage the number of individuals within VASNHS' facilities at any given time, walk-in services (with the exception of Lab and General X-ray services) and direct scheduling remain discontinued for the foreseeable future.

Veterans who have questions about the expansion of services or have an urgent need for Same-Day primary or mental health care, should **call 702-791-9024 (for primary care) or 702-791-9062 (for mental health) between 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday-Friday.**

For a medical emergency, Veterans should always call 911 or report to the closest emergency room. Additionally, if a Veteran is in crisis outside regular business hours, he or she should visit the nearest emergency room or contact the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (Option 1) OR Text 838255; OR confidential chat: www.veteranscrisisline.net



Message From The Director

How VASNHS Is Moving Forward In a Phased Approach To Health Care Services

I'm proud to announce that VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System is leading the way in expanding numerous health care services as Nevada starts re-opening from the recent COVID-19 shutdowns. As one of the first sites nationally to expand in-person care, VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System is implementing a phased approach in providing more services. In doing so, we want to make sure everyone is aware of the steps we're taking to ensure the health and safety of both our patients and staff.

Although we will be seeing more face-to-face traffic in our facilities, we will continue to provide significant amounts of care through virtual means such as telehealth, phone consults and VA Video Connect when feasible. While we are welcoming back veterans for care, the no-visitor policy will continue to be in place. This means nobody under the age of 18, and no outside visitors will be allowed to accompany a veteran to an appointment unless they are required to directly assist or care for the veteran.

Additionally, to minimize foot traffic within our facilities, we are requesting that you **arrive no earlier than 15 minutes prior to the scheduled appointment time**. If you arrive sooner you will be asked to wait in your car until it is time for your appointment. Consistent with our current process, you will be asked health screening questions and we'll take your temperature screening when entering all facilities.

If it is determined that a Veteran is experiencing a health issue that needs to be immediately addressed, he or she will be escorted to another location for further evaluation. Screeners will also ensure visitors have a mask or other face covering, which must be worn at all times while in our facilities.



Floor mats are in place to enforce physical distancing requirements in all VASNHS facilities.



Director Bill Caron gets a temperature reading before entering a VASNHS facility.

After clearing screening, Veterans will notice our waiting areas have been set up to ensure physical distancing practices in compliance with CDC guidelines. There are fewer chairs available and they are spaced further apart. Patients will also see plexiglass shields in some areas in the future, and we ask that you practice physical distancing in all areas and interactions.

During your appointment, staff providing your direct care will be wearing various types of personal protective equipment depending on the services being delivered. Veterans can expect your providers to be wearing a mask and also a gown, gloves and face shield during any close contact with patients.

Finally, every patient room will undergo a cleaning after every appointment to ensure a sanitary environment for every patient we see.

We've all made great strides in limiting the effect coronavirus has had in our hospital, clinics, city, and state. Continuing these efforts will ensure patient and staff safety as we move forward as part of our new normal.

Thank You for your continued support and cooperation in these trying times.

William J. Caron, PT, MHA, FACHE
Medical Center Director/CEO

Limiting The Spread of COVID-19

VASNHS Universal Masking Requirements

By Dr. Jason Dazley, VASNHS Infectious Disease Specialist

Universal masking is now a way of life, at work and outside in the community, but many of us struggle with wearing a mask and want to take it off. Here are a few methods to wear a mask for the long haul.

Nose breathing is better than mouth breathing, because it filters the air, and stimulates hormones like nitric oxide and helps regulate vital functions like blood pressure and heart rate better. We take about 25,000 breaths per day, so it is critical to have good breathing habits. Rapid, shallow breathing keeps the body in a high state of alert and engages the sympathetic nervous system, an adaptation that is useful in times of danger but counterproductive to feeling calm and relaxed the rest of the time.

Even during normal times, many people breathe too fast and through their mouths, perhaps because of chronic stress, nose congestion or a deviated septum. It is our tendency to breath faster while wearing a mask, but if we do it slowly, inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth, even when exercising-without very much effort, you can retrain how you breathe — with or without a mask — so you aren't in a fight or flight frenzy.

A rapid, shortened breathing cycle uses muscles in the neck and chest instead of the diaphragm. This makes it harder to

mentally relax. Performance breathing subject matter experts indicate, that doing five minutes of respiratory muscle training every morning and every night can help people learn to breathe more effectively without having to think about it.

Having stronger respiratory muscles may also help battle against the coronavirus. At the very least, it can make breathing through a mask less challenging. All of these suggestions work with any mask involving cloth, neoprene or other protective materials.

In addition to respiratory training, some simple steps may help make wearing a mask easier. Just before putting on your mask, take five "quality" breaths. With each breath, inhale through the nose for four seconds, exhale through the mouth for six seconds, then rest for two seconds. Repeat these five breaths as soon as you put on the mask, and again after you remove it.

If, you have to keep the mask on for extended periods of time throughout the day, take periodic breaks when you can safely remove the mask and breathe normally. Please remember to maintain physical distancing during these breaks, and whenever possible, move to an outdoor location.



**6 STEPS
TO GETTING
COMFORTABLE
WEARING
A MASK**

1. Nose breathing is better than mouth breathing.
2. We can develop good breathing habits with practice.
3. Practice breathing slowly through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.
4. Practice breathing slowly five minutes in the morning and night until it becomes a habit.
5. Take five quality breaths before putting on a mask and right after wearing the mask.
6. **Quality Breaths:** inhale through the nose for four seconds, exhale through the mouth for six seconds, then rest for two seconds.

What is VASNHS doing to keep Veterans safe?

Facility Entrance Screening

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System facilities have added screening protocols to ensure the safety of its patients and visitors. If you visit a VASNHS hospital, clinic, or other facility, you'll be met at the entrance by a staff member. They will greet you and ask screening questions. Depending on your answers, a VA health care professional will assist you on the next steps of your visit. There are ways you can make this process easier. Veterans can access the VA North Las Vegas Medical Center through the following locations:

NW Entrance (Bldg. 1)

5 a.m. - 6 p.m., Monday-Saturday

NE Entrance (Bldg. 1)

6 a.m. - 6 p.m., 7 Days Per Week

Behavioral Health Front Entrance

6 a.m. - 6 p.m., Monday-Saturday

Building 5

6 a.m. - 9 p.m., 7 Days Per Week

Emergency Department

Open 24 Hours, 7 Days Per Week

Veterans can now expedite their screening process by texting the word **SCREEN** to **53079**.

Users will be texted a link to answer the five screening questions and then upon arrival, they can show the results on the screen to the screener and get their temperature taken.

Those who are unable to access the application or link via smartphone, will need to answer screening questions at the entrances.

In-Person Health Care Services & Procedures

VASNHS Taking A Phased Approach to Re-opening Clinic Services and Procedures

As one of the first VA sites nationally to expand care following our response to the coronavirus, the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center and VASNHS' community clinics are reintroducing in-person health care services and procedures via a phased approach.

The safety of Veterans and staff is our highest priority as we continue to expand in-person health care and services for the foreseeable future. VASNHS is considering guidance from various agencies including federal, state and local officials, and, as a high reliability organization, safety is always paramount and will continue to guide our decision making.

Here is the current status (as of June 30, 2020) on care and services being offered by VASNHS:

In-person Group sessions, classes and courses:

All in-person group sessions, classes and courses throughout the healthcare system remain canceled until further notice. Virtual options such as telehealth and conference calls are being offered as alternatives wherever possible for Veterans participating in these activities. VASNHS is reaching out to affected individuals to discuss options.

Elective Surgeries and Non-Urgent Procedures:

As part of re-introducing in-person services, VASNHS has started phasing in elective surgeries and other non-urgent procedures. Patients affected by COVID-19 cancellations are being contacted by the facility to reschedule. If you have any questions, please call **702-791-9024**.

Pharmacy Hours:

To better align with patient flow and screening times at North Las Vegas VA Medical Center entrances, the Pharmacy has updated its hours of operation.

Current hours are: Monday-Friday: 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and Saturday-Sunday: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (excluding federal holidays)

After hours: Inpatient Pharmacy will continue to handle Emergency Department and inpatient discharges at the back window.

Community VA Clinic Labs and Imaging:

VASNHS has resumed lab and imaging services at its community VA clinics in the Las Vegas valley. Labs at the Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest VA clinics have reopened. Veteran patients may visit one of these locations between 7:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday for a scheduled lab draw. **Veterans may also continue to access the lab at the North Las Vegas VA Medical from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.** Laboratory services at the Pahrump VA Clinic and MCPO Jesse Dean VA Clinic in Laughlin will continue to be available by appointment only. Due to the need for physical distancing and limited seating due to COVID-19, VASNHS recommends that Veterans who do not have to fast for their lab draws visit in the afternoons to avoid delays and extended wait times. Additionally, to improve customer service and minimize wait times for Veterans, VASNHS will also be offering Veterans the option to schedule lab draws.

General X-ray services have also resumed at VA clinics in the Las Vegas valley. **Veterans who are not positive or suspected of having COVID-19 may visit the Northeast, Northwest, Southeast or Southwest VA clinics between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday for these services.**

General X-ray services will also continue via walk-in visits from **7 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily (excluding federal holidays)** at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center. Anyone positive or suspected of having COVID-19 will need to visit the medical center for general X-ray services. All other advanced imaging services are available by appointment only. No imaging services are available at the Pahrump or MCPO Jesse Dean VA clinics.



In-Person and Virtual Care Appointments:

While offering more face-to-face appointments, staff will continue to maximize personalized virtual care as we know these services have been a valuable link to our Veterans during this challenging time. Veterans can access options such as Telehealth, MyHealthVet Secure Messaging or VA Video Connect for their appointments. To request an in-person or virtual care appointment, call 702-791-9024. For more information on local virtual care visit: www.lasvegas.va.gov/services/Telehealth.asp

Elective Dental Procedures:

VASNHS' Dental Service is phasing in limited elective and emergency dental procedures locally for qualified Veterans. Routine exams and cleanings remain on hold. For more information, or questions regarding dental services, call 702-791-9019.

DAV Transportation:

The Disabled American Veterans Transportation System has temporarily ceased operations. All other volunteer programs have already been suspended. The Voluntary Service office remains open and can be reached at (702) 791-9134.

Veterans Experience and Patient Advocate:

All patient advocates and MyHealthvet coordinators are currently not providing face-to-face services, but are available virtually. Veterans are welcome to call the Veterans Experience Call Center at 702-791-9000 ext. 15436 to obtain assistance, or contact patient advocates or coordinators via MyHealthVet Secure Messaging.

Facility Revenue closed for In-person Visits:

The VA Facility Revenue Office located at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center remains closed to face-to-face visits, but available by phone. To make a payment, Veterans should call 1-888-827-4817 or visit www.pay.gov For questions about a bill or to set up a payment plan, Veterans should call 1-866-347-2353 or 808-538-2530.

Virtual Enrollment Options:

Due to COVID-19, face-to-face services at the VASNHS Enrollment Office remain suspended. VASNHS is encouraging Veterans who have not accessed care with the VA to enroll virtually at www.va.gov, or call the Health Eligibility Center at 877-222-8387. If a Veteran is currently enrolled at another VA location and would like to transfer to the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, they can call the enrollment office at 702-791-9071 between 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday-Friday.

Appointment Reminders Discontinued:

To avoid confusion regarding cancellations of upcoming face-to-face appointments, VASNHS has temporarily discontinued automated appointment reminder telephone calls and postcards. To check on future scheduled appointments or to cancel an appointment, Veterans can call VASNHS' automated telephone system at 702-791-9000, press 2, then press 1.

Fisher House Closure:

The VA Southern Nevada Fisher House remains closed until further notice.

Valet Parking Services Suspended:

VASNHS valet parking services at North Las Vegas VA Medical Center remain suspended until further notice.

Postponed VA Events and Public Outreach:

The Department of Veterans Affairs has postponed all VA events and ceased participation in all in-person public outreach events. VASNHS will provide updates and more information on any postponed events as it becomes available. We apologize for any inconvenience.

VA SUPPORT RESOURCES:

We realize many of you count on the VA as a lifeline, particularly when dealing with stressful events such as this. As such, we wanted to remind you that the following resources are available:

VA Mental Health COVID-19 Web Page

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/>

Veteran Crisis Line

If you are a Veteran in crisis, you can call **1-800-273-TALK (Option 1)**. OR Text **838255**; OR confidential chat: www.veteranscrisisline.net

VA Chaplaincy Support

The VASNHS Chaplaincy Support local number for Veterans is: **702-275-3011**. This number can be contacted at any time.



Be prepared to follow physical distancing floor markers in all VASNHS Facilities



VASNHS Helps Veterans Recover Quicker

Treating Veterans Using Plasma Donations from Recovered COVID-19 Patients

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System is partnering with Vitalant Blood Services in encouraging recovered COVID-19 patients to donate convalescent plasma. These much-needed plasma units could save lives of local Veterans who may be fighting against the virus in the future. “The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has regulated COVID Convalescent Plasma, or CCP, as an investigational COVID-19 treatment,” said Dr. Jason Dazley, a VASNHS Infectious Disease specialist. “It’s a way to treat critically ill patients who have few, if any, options left.”

Convalescent plasma is the liquid part of blood that contains antibodies. The body generates these blood proteins to fight against specific infections, such as COVID-19. Antibodies can directly attack the virus that causes COVID-19, as well as cells that the virus has entered. “It’s believed that COVID-19 patients may improve faster if they receive plasma from those who have recovered from the disease,” said Dazley.

Nationally, Department of Veteran Affairs is partnering with the Mayo Clinic on an expanded-access study to evaluate CCP therapy for COVID-19 patients. VASNHS has been using CCP in treating Veterans who have tested positive for COVID-19 since early May. Vitalant has played an integral role in helping to facilitate the extracting and processing of these donations. This partnership has helped VASNHS become one of the first VA health care systems in the nation to pioneer this process.

VASNHS patients, staff, volunteers and others who have recovered from COVID-19 and want their plasma used to assist in treating Veterans are encouraged to use the VA referral process to donate CCP through Vitalant. “The biggest thing is, if we refer them, we get plasma back,” said Leanne Beasley, VASNHS Blood Bank supervisor. “We hope to build up enough of an inventory and variety of blood types to have a unit ready for any Veteran in need.”

For CCP donations, many of the same requirements and criteria for blood donations still apply. However, there are some differences compared to normal blood donations. Only people who have tested positive and recovered from COVID-19 are eligible to donate CCP. Donors who are between 14-27 days without symptoms will need a confirmed negative test result, while those who are more than 28 days out do not. With plasma, donors can donate every seven to ten days, depending



VASNHS Dr. Parisa Khan donates plasma after recovering from COVID-19 which was used to treat Veterans at the VAMC.

on the donor’s health. Beasley says that VASNHS is looking for donations of all blood types. “The universal plasma donation type is AB, but type A can be used for about 85% of the recipient population,” she said. “And luckily RH-type doesn’t matter with plasma.”

While the normally scheduled blood drives at VASNHS have been postponed due to the pandemic, VASNHS and Vitalant normally conduct as many as five drives per year at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center. “We have run Vitalant blood drives at our facility for five years, and we bring in a lot of blood for them at our drives,” said Beasley. “I’ve been told that we bring in more units for them than anyone in the local community, and we aren’t as big as many of the other hospitals. A lot of that is because we have a lot of Veterans who appreciate and understand the need for donating blood.”

vitalant.

Individuals interested in donating convalescent plasma, should contact **Lynda Kruthoff at (702) 791-9000 ext. 13257** to begin the screening process. To learn more about the criteria for CCP donation, visit www.vitalant.org/COVIDfree

VASNHS Research: Coronavirus Precautions

VASNHS Specialists Provide COVID-19 Safety Tips

In the fight against coronavirus at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, Dr. Jason Dazley and Dr. Myron Kung are leading the effort to slow the spread of the virus. They offer the following COVID-19 safety tips.

“We all know the basic precautions we can take to protect ourselves,” said Dazley, a VASNHS infectious disease specialist. “Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds. Avoid crowds. Cover your cough and sneeze. Keep your hands away from your face. Clean frequently used items using approved products. But there are many other ways you can keep yourself and loved ones safe.”

1. Practice physical distancing, but don't social isolate.

This means maintaining six feet of space from those outside your household and avoiding unnecessary gatherings, but not avoiding socializing altogether. “We don't want anyone to be lonely and on their own,” said Kung, a VASNHS pulmonary critical care specialist. “We can still use technology to communicate and stay connected. That's so important as we continue to move forward in a new normal.”

2. Stay involved. “Find activities you can do at home,” said Dazley. “If you like to cook, that's great. Maybe you like to scrapbook old photos or memorabilia. There may be some happy memories in that. Find something constructive like a hobby or pastime that helps you to remain engaged and positive.”

3. Minimize the risk of exposure in your daily routine. “This really applies whether you are in public or at work,” Dazley continued “Find ways to use telework or teleconferencing if possible. Use correct personal protective equipment when in public. I try to keep myself and my Veterans safe by conducting virtual appointments whenever possible.”

4. Avoid unnecessary travel in general. Everyone feels like they need a vacation, but look for ways to enjoy the experience of travelling virtually. Many museums offer virtual tours, there are music festivals that you can enjoy for free online, and you can even experience many National Parks with 360 drone footage from their official websites.

5. Decide on a plan. “Involve family members and try to come up with a plan if you become sick,” recommends Dazley. “Prepare things in advance in case anything should happen and make a list of emergency contacts.”



VASNHS Dr. Jason Dazley accompanied Dr. Parisa Khan during her plasma donation after recovering from COVID-19 which was used to treat VASNHS Veterans.

6. Look out for symptoms of exposure. People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19: Fever or chills, dry cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. If you are experiencing one or more of these symptoms, talk to your healthcare provider. “Call ahead before coming to the Medical Center,” said Kung. “If you or a loved one develop symptoms... call primary care and follow their instructions. If you have difficulty breathing or a severe fever, go to the emergency room.”

7. Know your risk factors. The CDC recently added obesity to a list that includes the elderly, people with lung or kidney disease, and those with diabetes. People with moderate to severe asthma are also at higher risk, along with those with cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Those with conditions such as sickle-cell disease, poorly controlled HIV infection, bone marrow transplants or an organ transplant are also at risk. The CDC also removed the specific age threshold, saying it's not just those over age 65 who are at increased risk for severe illness.

Upcoming Events July - Sept 2020 (Go to www.lasvegas.va.gov for current dates & times)

4 July - Independence Day - Federal Holiday

21 July - Veterans Administration Created 1930

August - National Immunization Awareness Month

4 August - U.S. Coast Guard Birthday

7 Aug - Purple Heart Day est. 1782

September - Suicide Prevention Month

7 Sept - Labor Day - Federal Holiday

15 Sept - National Hispanic Heritage Month

18 Sept - U.S. Air Force Birthday

18 Sept - National POW/MIA Recognition Day

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Changing Behavior for Better Health

The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) *"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 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.



Moving Forward at VASNHS

Making Progress During the COVID-19 Pandemic

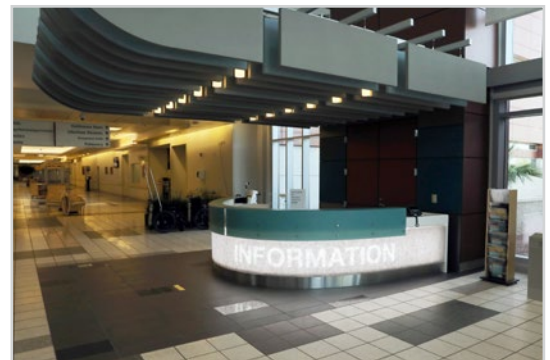
VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System is leading the way in providing virtual mental health care appointments. Within this VA Sierra Pacific Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), VASNHS had the greatest number of appointments fulfilled since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. From March 1 to June 26, 2020, VASNHS has completed 14,343 VA Video Connect (VVC) visits in behavioral health, which represents 50.7 percent of all behavioral health appointments during this time period. VISN 21 has completed 33.5 percent of all behavioral health appointments via VVC, which puts VASNHS +17.2 percentage points above the VISN 21 average.

While VA Video Connect usage has increased across many VASNHS services, Mental Health makes up 80 percent of daily completed appointments on VVC. "Our mental health care has increased by 700 percent in virtual appointments," said Tim Jobin, VASNHS' associate chief of staff of Behavioral Health. "Even while we weren't doing that many in-person appointments, if Veterans needed that help, we were doing virtual appointments across the board."

Mental health care is especially important during stressful times, and VASNHS invites Veterans to take advantage of the care they've earned. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said the numbers show VA has made a quick adjustment to ensure ongoing support to Veterans during these difficult times.

"VA is open for business and we continue to provide same-day mental health services and mental health screening for Veterans at-risk who require attention at any of our facilities," said Wilkie. "There is no doubt VA's early embrace of new technology is aiding Veterans and I applaud VA health care workers and Veteran patients for embracing it."

**To request a virtual care appointment
or to convert an in-person appointment
to virtual care, call 702-791-9024.**



The completed west entrance at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center has a new customer information desk providing safe clearance for Veterans in wheelchairs and motorized carts.

For Veterans in crisis, help is available at the Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255, and press 1, or text 838255.

For the latest information in the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System
check out the following WEB links:

VASNHS Website
Free Email Alerts



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www.facebook.com/LasVegasVA



www.twitter.com/VALasVegas



www.myhealth.va.gov



www.instagram.com/VALasVegas

VASNHS YouTube



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