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New Non-Combat PTSD Program

Counseling program to help Veterans suffering from non-combat- related events



Veteran Ray Willhite with VA Social Worker Steven Fisher

The Non-Combat PTSD Program began at VASNHS in March it is a 16-week course, which provides both group-oriented therapy sessions and individual therapy for Veterans suffering the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder from a wide range of traumatic activities, not related to combat. “The program, is unique to this facility and the classes and manuals were developed locally,” said Steven Fisher, a VASNHS clinical social worker who manages the program.” According to Fisher, the new program covers seven specific skills to address trauma symptoms, including stress, sleep, intrusive thoughts, negative thinking patterns, problem-solving, anger, and communication.

Non-Combat PTSD can come from a number of sources, according to Fisher. “Handling human remains following an accident or mishap, witnessing a plane crash or other duty-related accident, having a near-death experience outside of combat, experiencing racism/violence as a military member, or experiencing physical trauma during training are all common causes of military trauma,” Fisher said “Non-military trauma can include events such as childhood sexual or physical abuse, childhood exposure to violence in a high-crime neighborhood, and severe

automobile accidents.” Regardless of the source, combat and non-combat PTSD have many similar effects on the daily life of a Veteran, but that doesn’t mean that their treatment should be handled the same. Fisher stated that it’s important to treat the different groups of PTSD separately. “In order to treat the full scale of Veterans dealing with trauma, it is important to provide programs that address all forms – combat and non-combat,” he said. “Those who have experienced combat trauma will commonly relate better to one another, while non-combat Vets will feel more secure getting treatment with those who share similar experiences outside of combat.”

Ray Willhite, a Marine Corps Veteran who is graduating along with the first class of Phase 1, said that the group portion of the program is helping to deal with anger issues that have come up in the past. He said he used to get in fights following his traumatic event, but working in the group setting has helped him find peace and understanding with other people, and provided him with the best medicine: laughter. “I’m finishing the first phase, but I’ll be here for the Second Phase, and whatever else is required.” Willhite added, “as long as it’s helping me with my family, I going to do what it takes.”

As the first group of six Veterans prepares to graduate from the program, the course is already seeing growth with as many as 13 Veterans participating in the second group. The next skills group begins June 21, but subsequent sessions will be held on a first-come, first-serve basis. Veterans who qualify for Non-Combat PTSD counseling should receive a referral from their provider.

U.S. VETS Healthy Teaching Kitchen for Veterans

VASNHS' Nutrition and Food Service partners with the United States Veterans Initiative (U.S. VETS)



Navy Veteran Kevin Scott serves breakfast to fellow Veterans at U.S. VETS Las Vegas

The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) is working with community partners to provide healthy meal options to homeless and at-risk Veterans in the Las Vegas area. Recently, dietitians from VASNHS' Nutrition and Food Service partnered with the United States Veterans Initiative (U.S. VETS) on a new educational initiative called The Healthy Teaching Kitchen to train Veterans in culinary arts, nutrition, and how to cook for themselves and their fellow Veterans.

"There are lots of things you can do to make your food taste just as good, if not better, but still cut down on some of the stuff that isn't good for your body," said Navy Veteran Kevin Scott as he served up a breakfast staple with a healthy twist – fried potatoes and onions. "We are trying to give a healthy alternative to a salty breakfast dish that people like to eat.

We incorporate vegetables like onions to create the flavor without using so much salt. On other days, we do hard-boiled eggs, yogurt, cottage cheese, fruits...we try to offer a wide variety of things that are pleasing and tasty, but also healthier for us." Deidra Devereaux, a VASNHS Clinical Dietician Supervisor at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center, has been helping to teach the Healthy Teaching Kitchen program with Veterans staying at the U.S. VETS temporary living facility in Las Vegas.

While the Veterans cook and serve the meals themselves, Devereaux provides additional information to residents. "We've been reaching out to the clients here as they get their meals to share nutrition information and encouraging them to make healthy meal choices," she said.

For Veterans who may have spent time homeless, dietary choices are often limited without access to facilities to store, prepare, and cook food. "Fast-food is often seen as inexpensive and convenient, but a diet consisting solely of this will often lead to many other health issues like obesity and diabetes," Scott said.

Veterans staying at U.S. VETS have access to a state-of-the-art kitchen, so it's the goal of Healthy Teaching Kitchen to make sure they take advantage of it. One of Nutrition and Food Service's biggest goals for the Healthy Teaching Kitchen is increasing awareness of their programs at the VA.

"We have found that most Veterans here don't know that the VA offers free dietician services," Devereaux said. "We have open access, so they don't have to go through their provider or a consult...all they need to do is call the medical center (702) 791-9000 ext. 13358 and say 'I want to go to a nutrition group.' We have eight every month, where they can learn in great detail."

But for many of the Veterans here, they eat what tastes good, and that's why Scott is working to make his healthy food as great as possible. "I love to eat, I love to cook, and I love to see people enjoy food."



VASNHS dietician Deidra Devereaux helps Veterans with healthier meal options

 **Healthy Living**
Healthy Living Matters. Prevention Works.

Getting Essential Vitamins during the Summer

Making the most of the summer and staying healthy too with VASNHS Nutrition Department



With the start of summer, here is one vitamin we can all get more of without ever having to change our diet. Vitamin D is a nutrient the body can produce from the sun's ultraviolet B (UVB) rays and is essential in maintaining strong bones by helping the body absorb calcium. Research suggests that vitamin D is also linked to control conditions such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease and dementia.

Factors that make individuals more vulnerable to vitamin D deficiency include older age, obesity and fat malabsorption disorders. Vitamin D deficiency can lead to brittle bones and may result in symptoms of muscle and bone pain.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommends an average daily intake of 600 IU (international units) of vitamin D for people up to the age of 70; for adults over 70 it is recommended to get 800 IU per day (based on the assumption of little sun exposure).

There are three ways to ensure you get enough vitamin D: sun exposure, food sources and vitamin D supplements.

1. Sun Exposure:

It is estimated that 10 to 30 minutes in the sun, completely exposed during mid-day, can provide up to 10,000 IU of vitamin D. Many factors affect a person's ability to produce vitamin D from the sun including skin pigmentation, age, cloud cover and use of sunblock lotion. The need for vitamin D must be balanced with safety from sun damage.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends a broad spectrum sunblock of at least 15 SPF. It is estimated that an SPF 15 sunscreen filters about 93% of UVB rays, meaning it is still possible to produce some vitamin D even while using sunblock properly.

2. Vitamin D-Rich Foods:

Vitamin D is found naturally in very few food sources. Fatty fish, like salmon, tuna, and mackerel are among the best natural sources; a 3-ounce serving of salmon offers roughly 447 IU of vitamin D. Milk, fortified breakfast cereals, orange juice and other dairy products are foods often fortified with vitamin D. One cup of fortified milk provides around 115-124 IU of vitamin D. Since the added amount of vitamin D can vary, it is best to check the nutrient label.



3. Vitamin D Supplements:

You can purchase over-the-counter vitamin D supplements containing anywhere from 400 to 10,000 IU per capsule. It is important to note that too much vitamin D can be harmful so consider limiting to no more than the upper limit of 4,000 IU a day from supplements. This limit does not apply to vitamin D produced from sun exposure as the body can regulate the production rate as necessary. Most vitamin D toxicity occurs from supplements so speak to your provider or dietitian before beginning any supplement regimen.

The only way to be certain you are meeting your needs is through a blood test known as 25-hydroxyvitamin D which measures your vitamin D level. You can ask your provider to be tested for vitamin D at your next blood draw. A level of 20-50 ng/mL is generally considered adequate for bone and overall health in healthy individuals. To learn more about your vitamin D needs, make an appointment with a VASNHS dietitian today!

For more information on VA Nutrition go to:
<https://www.nutrition.va.gov/>

VA Innovative Technology: Telestroke

Emergency stroke care using advanced technology is here at VASNHS



The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) is excited to embrace innovative technology to improve access and care for our Veterans. The telehealth model of care is not a new way to deliver medical care, it has been around for decades but, it is becoming more common in the medical mainstream to ensure better patient access to specialty expertise. The era of telecommunication technology gives us an opportunity to provide access to a neurologist 24/7 in real time with advanced audio and visual capabilities by establishing a telecommunication connection.

This allows for radiographic image sharing and interpretation and access to secured patient health information as well as the ability to perform an exam with the help of registered nurses using videoconferencing. The VA telestroke neuro specialist would be available at the Las Vegas VA medical center for all patients presenting with acute stroke symptoms using telehealth services. This will enable doctors to use telestroke as a useful tool to provide stroke care early and safely, saving brain function and decreasing long-term disability. A person having a stroke is a medical emergency, as time is brain. According to the American Stroke Association/American Heart Association stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in the U.S. and is the leading cause of long-term disability.

A stroke event can leave disabilities that can affect a person and their families for a life time, and resuming their previous lifestyle or employment may not be possible after a stroke. This medical emergency can have a drastic social and economic impact that can be devastating. The faster a patient is identified having a stroke, and is deemed a candidate for the only medically proven treatment for acute ischemic stroke, (which is a clot-dissolving drug called Alteplase) the better

the outcomes can be for the individual. The VA Telestroke program is comprised of a virtual HUB of neurologists who are located anywhere in the country at anytime will provide stroke consultation coverage. This telehealth technology brings the neurologist to the bedside early in the evaluation process, so that treatment can be initiated faster. The longer it takes for emergency stroke care to start, the greater the person's risk of disability or death.

The nurse manager for the Intensive Care Unit here at the VASNHS is Shari Kym MSN, RN-BC. She states that the telestroke program's "implementation [here] translates to saving a Veteran from a potentially life long disability and restoring brain function which has immeasurable value for the Veteran and their family." One of the emergency room nurses, Bridget Mona, RN, BSN who is also the Stroke Champion and one of the telestroke trainers for the ED, believes the telestroke program will "benefit our veterans by giving us, the providers, options to potentially administer a medication that can save brain function in the presence of an acute stroke."

The VA telestroke neurologist, via teleconferencing, will work in collaboration with the patient, family and physician in making the best recommendations for diagnostics, treatment options and is committed to providing the best care possible for our Veterans. One of the key indicators for a person who is at a higher risk for having a cerebral accident or stroke is having constant high blood pressure. Some of the signs of a stroke is difficulty speaking, can't get the words out or words don't make sense.

Other signs of a stroke is feeling dizzy, having vision loss, a sudden loss of sensation, numbness or weakness in the arms, legs or face and these can happen on just one side of the body. A person may also experience confusion, maybe drooling or having difficulty in swallowing. If you or someone you're with is experiencing these symptoms get emergency help quickly. If you're at home call 911 immediately, as time is brain, rapidly calling 911 for help will get the care needed faster than driving someone or yourself to the hospital.

The telestroke service is only available at the VA medical center and is not available at the community clinics. Notify a clinic staff member for help if you're experiencing these symptoms above. They can exam you and if a stroke is suspected, they can call 911 for you to transport you to the nearest hospital.

For more information go to: <https://www.telehealth.va.gov>

Behavioral Health Services (BHS)

Pro-active actions to meet mental and behavioral health needs of Veterans



Dr. Micol Levi-Minzi, Clinical Psychologist performing a warm hand-off to Primary Care Provider Dr. Maia Carter

Behavioral Health Services (BHS) has been very pro-active in hiring providers to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of our Veterans. Along with hiring more providers, several changes have been made within BHS programs to improve access and patient-centered quality of care.

One of the major changes within BHS is the implementation of a centralized mental health intake clinic at the VA Medical Center, Mental Health Clinic. Centralizing orientation and intake for Veterans who are new to mental health ensures they receive vital information about BHS services and processes, and to get connected with the right program(s) to meet their needs. This change also increases the availability of providers to see patients already established in care.

Other changes within BHS include increased availability for same-day access to the Addictive Disorder Treatment Program. Veterans can now be assessed Monday thru Friday, 0730-0900 hours, although consults are preferred. An Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) is now available to address recovery from addictive disorders.

The PTSD Program has expanded their programming to include a third track. Along with combat related and military sexual trauma related tracks,

a non-combat trauma (e.g., childhood trauma, military, or non-military) track is available to Veterans who suffer from PTSD. All tracks include both individual psychotherapy and psychoeducational groups. Additionally, for Veterans who experience PTSD and have a serious substance use disorder (SUD), a PTSD/SUD provider is available as well. All these services are available to eligible Veterans through a consult from a mental health provider.

Primary Care – Mental Health Integration (PC-MHI) has been implemented at each primary care clinic (PCC) and the Medical Center. If you are a new patient to mental health and a primary care provider (PCP) determines you need to be seen same-day, or you request to be seen, your PCP will introduce you to a mental health provider. This provider will complete a brief assessment to determine your immediate needs. Together, you will develop a plan of action. PC-MHI can provide 1-6 sessions of brief solution-focused therapy for mild to moderate problems. Should you need long-term or specialty care, you will be referred to the orientation and intake process.

Veterans in crisis or having thoughts of suicide - and those who know a Veteran in crisis - should call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text to 838255.



INNOVATION TO IMPLEMENTATION



Behavioral Science: Lithium Study

PI: Dennis Chang, M.D.

Synopsis:

Observational evidence and findings from clinical trials conducted for other reasons suggest that lithium, a drug used for the treatment of bipolar disorder, and, to a lesser extent, depression, may reduce rates of suicides and suicide attempts.

However, this hypothesis has not yet been adequately examined in a randomized clinical trial conducted specifically to test lithium's efficacy in preventing suicides. This clinical trial fills this gap.

This study is feasible within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) because it is a large, integrated health system with existing programs for identifying patients at risk for suicide and delivering enhanced services.

In VA, approximately 12,000 patients with depression or bipolar disorder survive a suicide attempt or related behavior each year, and 15% of them repeat within one year. Experimental treatment in this study will supplement usual care for major depression or bipolar disorder, as well as VA's standard, enhanced management for patients at high risk.

Veterans benefit from Technological Advances in Audiology

VA audiologists are focused on quality care and products to Veterans suffering from hearing loss and tinnitus

Daniel Ford served as a helicopter crew chief for 15 of his 22 years in the U.S. Marine Corps. Between the noises from the engine, the weapons, and the rotary blades, the Vietnam Veteran experienced dangerous levels of sound daily. Of all the dangers he encountered while on duty, hearing loss was the last thing on his mind. “We used to wear helmets for communication and protection, but ear plugs weren’t really being used until the time I retired,” Ford said.

When he first saw an audiologist upon his retirement in 1987, Ford’s hearing had deteriorated to the point where he could barely hear or understand a conversation with his children. “I was told that nothing could help my hearing loss. It was there, it was gonna be there, it was something I was just going to have to deal with for the rest of my life.” Ford is not alone. Hearing loss and tinnitus are the most prevalent service-connected disabilities of all compensation recipients among Veterans in every period of service since World War II.

Additionally, hearing loss impacts approximately 45 percent of adults over the age of 65 in the general population. The most common type of hearing loss among Veterans is high frequency sensorineural hearing loss that varies in severity from mild to profound. This type of hearing loss is generally caused by noise exposure, age or both and causes difficulty distinguishing sounds or understanding speech. While wearable hearing aids have existed in some form since the 1940s, the last 30 years have shown incredible leaps in technology. This has not only made the devices more effective, but less obtrusive and easier to conceal. “When I registered here at the VA, that’s when I found out that hearing aids could help my hearing loss,” Ford said. “It wouldn’t just be a loudspeaker in my ear, it would be something that could really help.”

“These vital technologies truly change the lives of our Veterans, and allow them to stay connected with sound,” said VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System Audiologist Dr. Jemila Fairley. “These modern advancements have been proven to provide substantial quality of life improvements in areas such as communication, isolation, and relations with family and friends. Veterans are able to actively participate in their own health care, enjoy quality time with loved ones, make phone calls, wirelessly stream music and other media directly through their hearing aids, and much more.”

Nationwide, VA audiologists are focused on bringing quality care and products to Veterans suffering from hearing loss and tinnitus. With more than 1,300 Veterans served at locations throughout the country, the Department of Veterans Affairs is the largest employer of audiologists in the United States.



VASNHS Audiologist Dr. Fairley conducts hearing tests on a female Veteran

As such, VA can provide state-of-the-art technology, including hearing aids, FM systems, cochlear implants, tinnitus maskers, and alerting devices to assist Veterans as medically necessary. The VASNHS Audiology Clinic currently consists of nine all doctoral-level audiologists, three audiology technicians in-house (plus telehealth technicians at four locations in Southern Nevada), and two doctoral candidates in their final rotations.

“At the VA, audiologists work with Veterans, servicemembers and their families to improve communication by using advanced technologies and extensive counseling.” Fairley said. “Both in our VA clinics and via telehealth, we provide screenings, diagnostic hearing evaluations, hearing aid fittings and repairs, aural rehabilitation, and many other services.” Dr. Fairley is our lead Audiologist for the Cochlear Implant program.

And for Veterans like Ford, these services have had a great impact on their lives. “Since I retired in 1987, audiology through the VA has improved 1,000 percent,” he said. “Thirty-one years ago, I had no hearing aids, and today I am wearing them and my hearing is perfect. Every time I’ve wanted some assistance or had questions about the capabilities or the testing, the VA has been there to help me the whole way.”

The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System offers direct scheduling for Veterans in need of routine hearing exams without the need of a consult from a provider. Routine exams can be scheduled by any Primary Care Clinic medical support assistant or by calling the VASNHS Call Center at 702-791-9024 then hit # then 2

SPECIAL NOTE:

This process cannot be used to schedule exams in support of compensation and pension claims. Veterans filing claims for hearing loss will be scheduled by the VA as part of their claims process so all requirements are met.

VA Innovation - VEText helps to improve appointment notifications

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System is proud to announce an exciting new initiative for VA Appointments!

What is VEText?

- An automated, interactive text message system to remind Veterans of upcoming VA appointments. Veterans can respond to confirm or cancel an appointment.

Why is VA introducing VEText?

- For one reason or another, Veterans miss more than 9 million health care appointments each year. Sometimes it is hard to keep track of the times or it may be difficult to cancel appointments. This program will send timely text alerts. Veterans can confirm or cancel the date and time with a simple text back. VA will then offer any newly opened appointment times to other Veterans.

What does VEText do?

- Reminds Veterans of appointments.
- Allows Veterans a useful cancellation option if desired.
- Allows a download of the reminder to a calendar file.

When will VEText start?

In effect since May 25, 2018 for most VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System appointments.

What do Veterans need to do to get started?

- Update or provide an active cell phone number with VA staff
- No need to opt-in; text appointment reminders will occur automatically.
- Veterans may **STOP** the texts by following the instructions within the texts.
- No cell phone? No problem. VEText does not replace other reminders. It simply improves the experience.
- VEText does not show personal information—just a simple reminder of an appointment and offers tools to manage the appointment.



VEText

Text Message Appointment Reminders & Cancellation System

Forgot to mark your next appointment on your calendar?
With text message appointment reminders, never miss an appointment again!

Something came up?
Automatically cancel your appointment through the text message system.

Make sure we have your cell phone # listed.

Upcoming Events July - Sept 2018 (Go to www.lasvegas.va.gov for current dates & times)

4 July - Independence Day - Federal Holiday

6 July - Veterans Town Hall Legion Post 60 - Laughlin NV

9 July - Employment Bootcamp & Qtrly Veterans Town Hall - VAMC

30 - 4 Aug - National Veterans Wheelchair Games – Orlando, Fla.

4 Aug - U.S. Coast Guard 227th Birthday

3 - 4 Aug - National Veterans Golden Age Games – Albuquerque, NM

10 - 11 Aug - At Ease Event: Free Legal Assistance for Veterans - VAMC

1 Sep - Suicide Prevention Month

3 Sep - Labor Day - Federal Holiday

18 Sep - U.S. Air Force 71st Birthday



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>

VASNHS NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY VASNHS Public Affairs North Las Vegas VA Medical Center 6900 North Pecos Road North Las Vegas, NV 89086 Email: VALASPAO@va.gov



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VASNHS YouTube



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Special Events



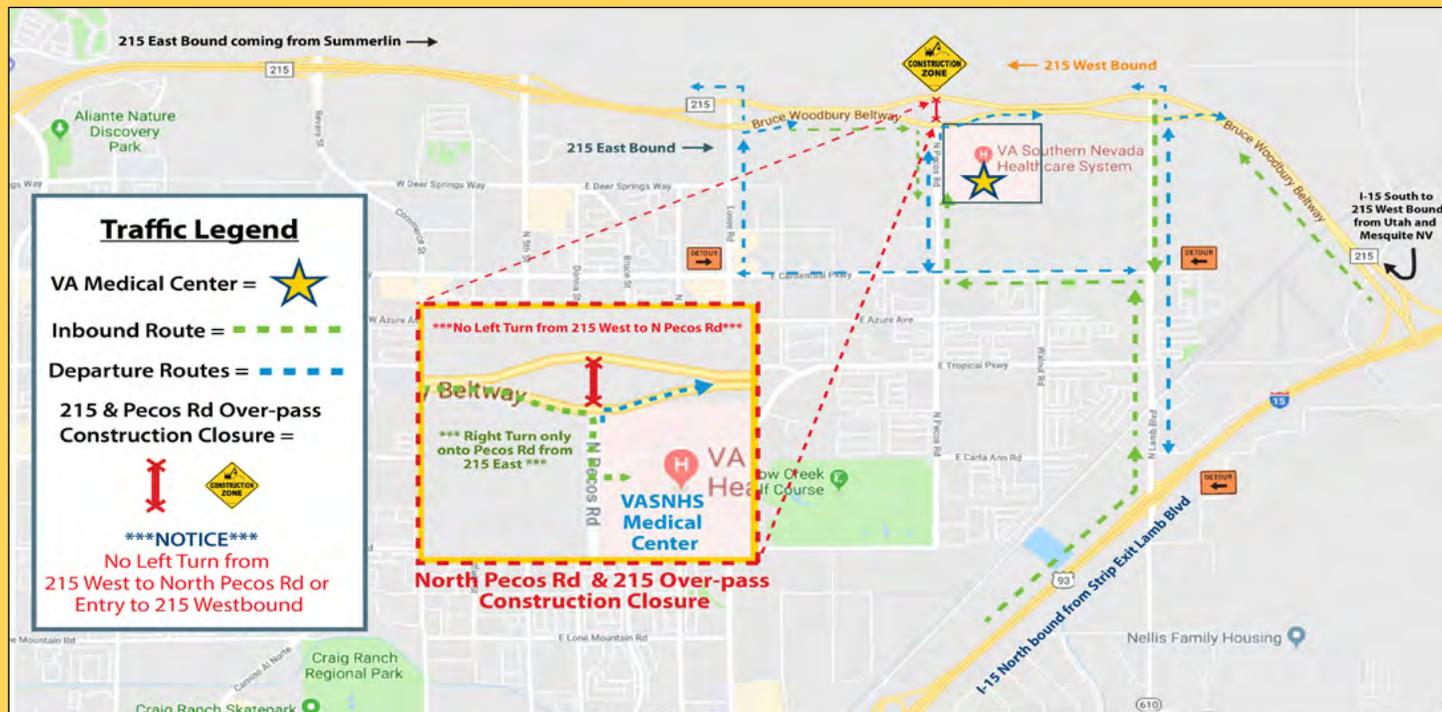
When: Thursday, July 19, 2018 at 2 p.m. - 6 p.m.
Where: VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System
 VA Medical Center Auditorium
 6900 N. Pecos Road
 North Las Vegas, NV 89086

(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)

Background:

Numerous Federal, State and Local Agencies and Community Partners will be on hand to provide information and assistance to Veterans, active-duty, Guard and Reserve personnel, families and caregivers. Co-hosted by the Southern Nevada Veterans Community Engagement Board (SNVCEB) and the Department of Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The SNVCEB Employment Bootcamp 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 July 19, 2018**, which includes the **moderated Town Hall from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m.** and **SNVCEB Employment Bootcamp Fair from 2 p.m. to 6 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.

ATTENTION: PECOS ROAD/CC-215 BRIDGE CLOSURE SCHEDULED FOR JULY 2018



VASNHS staff and Veterans will begin seeing major traffic changes around the VA Medical Center over the next year as the next phase of improvements begins on the Clark County 215 Beltway between North 5th Street and Lamb Boulevard. The first impact will be felt in July as the current bridge in front of the VA Medical Center at 215 and Pecos Road closes for approximately four months for demolition and construction of a new bridge. Individuals travelling to VA Medical Center eastbound on the 215 from the Northwest will be able to exit at Pecos Road, but will need to use S. Lamb Blvd. or Losee Rd. to travel westbound on the 215 from the facility. Individuals traveling to the facility westbound on the 215 from I-15 will not be able to exit at Pecos. They will need to exit at S. Lamb Blvd. or Losee Road. Pecos Road will be open to eastbound traffic toward I-15 on the 215 from the facility during this phase of construction. Those travelling to the VA Medical Center on I-15 North from Las Vegas are advised to exit at Lamb Blvd. and take E. Centennial Pkwy to Pecos Road.