
Innovative treatment for Vets with Type 2 diabetes

Currently, VA offers medical care including diet counseling, weight loss programs, and blood glucose monitoring for the 1.5 million Veterans enrolled in VA health care who have Type 2 diabetes.

When a person has Type 2 diabetes, the body's resistance to insulin — a hormone that helps move sugar into cells — causes high blood glucose levels. This, in turn, may cause other health problems, such as damage to nerves and blood vessels, increased risk of stroke or heart disease, or kidney failure.

Dr. Laurence J. Meyer, chief officer of specialty care services at VA, said that Veterans who carry excess body weight may be at risk for a Type 2 diabetes diagnosis. More than 50 percent of Veterans in VHA care are overweight or obese.

VA is exploring an innovative treatment that would offer Veterans another diabetes management option in addition to those already available in VA.

Planned partnership will benefit Veterans

VA's [Office of Specialty Care Services](#) is exploring a partnership with Virta Health Corp., an online specialty medical clinic, to offer Veterans this option.

Virta focuses on reversing Type 2 diabetes through noninvasive treatments including dietary guidance and the use of medical specialists' expertise, peer support, and health coaching.

Through this partnership, Virta will offer free individualized diabetes management planning to a limited number of Veterans for the length of treatment, which is typically one year. This small pilot of Veterans with non-insulin dependent type II diabetes is designed for 400 patients.

The enrollment details and instructions are still under development, and the enrollment timeline will be announced when the partnership is finalized.

Virta's approach

The partnership with Virta would add to the current Type 2 diabetes care offered by VA. Veterans would receive continuous telehealth support from Virta's care team, comprised of medical providers and health coaches, and close guidance in following an individualized nutrition plan based on carbohydrate restriction. This approach, Dr. Meyer says, can lead to sustained improvement in glycemic control and weight loss.

“Many Veterans have trouble managing their diabetes and blood sugar, and many struggle with their weight and sticking to any diet,” Dr. Meyer said. “This leads to a lot of functional limitations. This partnership is potentially a way that some Veterans might benefit from this care on an individual basis.”

Partnerships augment VA services

VHA’s Office of Community Engagement (OCE) is a trusted resource and catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community level, and facilitates establishment of partnerships such as this one. VHA is committed to working with Veterans to optimize their health and well-being.

Working with nongovernmental community partners supports Veterans’ freedom of choice in health care, expands access to care and services that augment what VHA offers, and exemplifies VHA’s priority of bringing Veterans quality care, wherever they are, through partnerships.

The enrollment details are still under development until the partnership is finalized. Instructions for interested providers and Veterans are forthcoming.

VA to make new nasal spray drug available for treatment-resistant depression

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced its health care providers will now be able to offer the newly approved Spravato nasal spray for treatment-resistant depression.

The treatment will be made available to Veterans based on their individual medical needs combined with providers’ clinical assessments.

The move follows the [March 5 Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\) approval](#) of Spravato (esketamine) nasal spray. Spravato was approved for use in conjunction with an oral antidepressant for the treatment of treatment-resistant depression in adults.

“We’re pleased to be able to expand options for Veterans with depression who have not responded to other treatments,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It reflects our commitment to seek new ways to provide the best health care available for our nation’s Veterans.”

Spravato will be available through a restricted distribution system under an FDA-approved Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS). The purpose of the REMS is to mitigate the risks of serious adverse outcomes and the potential abuse and misuse of Spravato.

VA health care providers will monitor Veterans for serious adverse outcomes, such as sedation and difficulty with attention, judgment and thinking (dissociation), abuse and misuse, worsening of depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Veterans will self-administer Spravato nasal spray under the direct observation of a health care provider in a certified medical facility, and then must be monitored by a health care provider for at least two hours after receiving their dose. Spravato cannot be dispensed directly to Veterans for use at home.

For additional information on access to Mental Health Support for Veterans, visit [VA Mental Health](#). Veterans in immediate crisis may call the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 and press 1, text to 838255 or chat online at [Veterans Crisis Line](#).

VA's Appeals Modernization Act takes effect today

New law streamlines department's current claims and appeals process for Veterans

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has implemented the [Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017](#), which was signed into law Aug. 23, 2017, and represents one of the most significant statutory changes to benefit Veterans in decades.

“This is a historic day for VA, its stakeholders and, most importantly, for Veterans and their families,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act comes as a direct result of collaboration among VA, Congress and Veteran Service Organizations to deliver on Veterans’ longstanding desire for reform of the legacy appeals system. Beginning today, Veterans will have greater choice in how VA reviews their disagreement with a VA claims decision and enjoy timely resolutions of disagreements through a streamlined process.”

Effective today, Veterans who appeal a VA claims decision have three decision review options:

Higher-Level Review, Supplemental Claim and Appeal to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.

- In the Higher-Level Review option, a more experienced adjudicator will conduct a new review of the previous decision.
- Veterans who select the Supplemental Claim option may submit new and relevant evidence, and VA will assist in developing new evidence under its duty to assist.
- If Veterans appeal a decision to the Board, they can choose one of three dockets: direct review, evidence or hearing.

VA's goal is to complete Supplemental Claims and Higher-Level Reviews in an average of 125 days, and decisions appealed to the Board for direct review in an average of 365 days. Under the legacy process, decisions averaged three to seven years.

VA remains committed to reducing significantly the inventory of legacy appeals. VA's fiscal year 2019 budget included funding for 605 additional appeals employees, which VA used to establish two new Decision Review Operations Centers at the St. Petersburg, Florida, and Seattle, Washington, regional offices. The former Appeals Resource Center in Washington, D.C., was converted to a third Decision Review Operations Center.

For more than 18 months, VA has worked toward full implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act, but reform has been a goal for VA and its stakeholders for years. In March 2016, VA sponsored an "Appeals Summit" in which VA, Veterans Service Organizations, Veterans advocates and Congress worked together to design a new appeals system. The summit resulted in the drafting, passage and implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act.

For more information on Appeals Modernization, visit <http://www.va.gov/decision-reviews>.

VA publishes interim final rule on cash-out home loans to further protect Veterans

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it has published an interim **final rule** relating to VA-guaranteed cash-out refinance loans to further protect Veteran home-loan borrowers from predatory lending practices.

This rule implements certain provisions of the [Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act](#), and provides new regulatory safeguards relating to VA-guaranteed cash-out refinance loans. Such loans generally allow borrowers to convert home equity into cash.

In many cases, the principal balance of the new refinance loan is larger than the payoff amount of the loan being refinanced. This means the Veteran will generally receive some amount of cash at closing. The cash can then be used at the Veteran's discretion to pay off debt, fund education, make home improvements and more.

VA's cash-out home-loan program can also be used to refinance a non-VA loan into a VA-guaranteed loan. Certain borrowers can use VA-guaranteed cash-out refinance loans to borrow up to 100 percent of the value of their home.

"VA has taken significant steps to make the home-loan benefit the most competitive loan program available to Veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We want to ensure the home-loan program

remains strong, attractive and accessible to all who are eligible, while creating a framework for lender accountability to Veterans and taxpayers.”

The rule will help protect Veterans from predatory refinance practices and minimize risk to taxpayers and the secondary mortgage market. For example, the rule specifically requires that lenders disclose clearly, both at the time of application and again at closing, a plain comparison of the existing loan’s cost with that of the new loan. These disclosures will help Veterans understand the impact of the refinance loan. This is in line with VA’s current policy on [Interest Rate Reduction Refinance Loans](#).

Further, the rule imposes loan seasoning and “net tangible benefit” standards. To meet the seasoning requirement, at least 210 days must pass and six monthly payments must be made prior to refinancing an existing loan. The cash-out refinance loan must also provide the Veteran with at least one of eight “net tangible benefits” defined by VA in the rule.

Since 1944, VA has guaranteed over 23 million home loans worth more than \$2 trillion. Veterans with questions about the VA Home Loan Program should call 877-827-3702. For more information on the VA Home Loan program, visit <https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/>.

FCC and VA to Combat Illegal Robocalls Targeting Veterans

Dear Veterans and Stakeholders,

The US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) continue to team up to combat illegal robocalls targeting Americans, including Veterans and their families.

Each year, the FCC receives more than 200,000 complaints about unwanted calls. While this may seem like a big number, it pales in comparison to the millions of robocalls being made each day. The calls interrupt dinners and family time; they flood landline and mobile phones. Scam calls frequently solicit money for fake charities, including ones claiming to support America’s Veterans - some even claiming to be VA representatives.

We know that scam activity increases during the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, so the FCC and VA urge you to be vigilant. We offer the following tips to help you avoid unwanted calls and scams.

- Don't answer calls from unknown numbers. Scammers may spoof their caller ID to display a fake number that appears to be local. If you answer such a call, hang up immediately.
- Never give out personal information such as account numbers, Social Security numbers, mother's maiden names, or passwords in response to unexpected or suspicious calls.
- Be sure to set a password for all voice mail accounts to avoid being hacked.
- Register your number on the [Do Not Call List](#) to block calls from legitimate telemarketers.
- Ask your phone company about call-blocking tools and services for your landline phone, and check for helpful apps that you can download to your mobile phone.

Please help spread the word about robocall fraud among those who may need assistance particularly those who are frequently targeted by phone scams.

For more information, visit: fcc.gov/robocalls.

Sincerely

Veterans Benefits Administration

VA's New App

VA's updated Exposure Ed app is now available for download at no cost on both Apple and Android mobile devices. **If you downloaded the Exposure Ed app prior to August 1, 2018, on an Apple device, please delete and reinstall the app to have the latest version.** You can download the app and learn more at <https://mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed>.

The Exposure Ed app provides health care providers with reliable, up-to-date information on military exposures and related VA policies and programs through their mobile device. Features of the Exposure Ed app include the ability to:

- Search for information about exposures and VA policies and programs through one of three filters - Exposures, Conflicts, and Date/Location.
 - Build a note during a visit or consultation and then distribute it to the Veteran via either e-mail or print.
 - Identify the location of their patient's local VA facilities.
 - Obtain guidance in four areas - questions to ask the Veteran, creating a care plan, risk communication tips, and useful resources.
 - Access bookmarks for useful websites with information on exposures, health care, and VA policies and programs.
-

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