



# UPDATE

January/February 2014

A bi-monthly newsletter for Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, and for those who serve Veterans. Send news items and comments to St. Cloud VA Health Care System, Attn: Public Affairs Officer, 4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN 56303, or via email to [Barry.Venable@va.gov](mailto:Barry.Venable@va.gov)

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In the midst of some wintry conditions, the St. Cloud VA Health Care system held a groundbreaking ceremony for a new 19,000 sq. ft. Rehabilitation Center on Dec. 16, 2013. Participants included David Ruder, Director of Facilities Management; Chief of Staff Dr. Susan Markstrom, Extended Care & Rehabilitation Director Mark Aberle; Health Care System Director Barry Bahl; Paradigm Construction Project Manager Andy Schilling; Greg Swanholm, Office of U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar, Karen Miller, Office of Sixth Congressional District Representative Michele Bachmann; and Jodi Dey, Office of Seventh District Representative Collin Peterson.

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## Calendar of Events

Monday, January 6 & February 19—Listen to the Bob Hughes-hosted **Veterans Affairs Radio Show** on KNSI, AM 1450/FM 103.3, at 8:10 a.m.

Tuesday, January 7 & 21, February 4 & 18 - **St. Cloud Area Veterans Law Clinic**, 12 to 2 p.m. Free legal consultation for Veterans for: Social Security Law, Housing, Consumer, Child Support, Family Law, and Employment. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320-253-0138 or 1-800-622-7773 to schedule an appointment. Appointments are held at the St. Cloud VA in Building T-100.

January 10 & February 14—Montevideo CBOC Caregiver Support Group 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Contact Jess Behrends at 320-252-1670 ext. 7283 for more information.

January 17 & February 21—**Southwestern Minnesota Veterans' Law Clinic**, Noon to 2 p.m., at the Montevideo CBOC. FREE legal consultation for Veterans. Please call 320-430-1051 to schedule an appointment.

January 19 & February 19—Listen to the **Voices for Veterans Radio Show** on WJON AM 1240, at 8:10 a.m.

Monday, January 20—Most outpatient services will be closed to observe **Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday**, a Federal Holiday. Urgent Care Clinic open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Monday, February 3—**Audiology Clinic Open House** at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center in Building 29, Room 6 at 9 a.m.

Monday, February 17—Most outpatient services will be closed to observe **Washington's Birthday**, a Federal Holiday. Urgent Care Clinic open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

# ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY™

Receive tickets  
to Huskies  
Mens  
Basketball  
FREE!



Have your  
picture taken  
with Blizzard,  
the SCSU  
Mascot!

Presents:

**Ticket Tuesday**

AT

**St. Cloud VA Health Care System Canteen**



**Tuesday January 7<sup>th</sup> 2014 11:15-noon**

**Meet coaches from Husky  
Athletics**

## USELESS FACT

A low-end cell phone has 240,000 times the memory of the computers on Voyager 1, which is now nearly 12 billion miles from Earth.

## QUOTATION OF THE DAY

"There's a fine line between fishing and standing on the shore like an idiot."  
- Steven Wright

## What about the new health law?

Despite all the news reporting about the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), websites that did not work, and frustrations of people trying to enroll, the 37,000-plus Veterans already enrolled in the St. Cloud VA Health Care System in Central



Minnesota were not affected by the Affordable Care Act's deadline of January 1, 2014 to have health insurance.

While VA health care enrollment is not insurance, it does meet the minimal standards of health care coverage that the law requires, so enrolled veterans did not have to take any additional steps to get credit for coverage for themselves.

Additionally, enrolled Veterans with other forms of health coverage, such as Medicare, TRICARE, or private insurance plans, can continue to use VA alongside these plans.

Veterans who are not enrolled are encouraged to apply for VA health care enrollment, even if you have other insurance. VA health care is a valuable benefit. There are no enrollment fees, monthly premiums, or deductibles and out-of-pocket costs are low. According to the Department of Veteran Affairs, the average annual out-of-pocket costs for Veterans in 2012 was \$422. *(continued next page)*

### Three things you should know:

- 1 VA wants all Veterans to receive health care that improves their health and well-being.
- 2 If you are enrolled in VA health care, you don't need to take additional steps to meet the health care law coverage standards. The health care law does not change VA health benefits or Veterans' out-of-pocket costs.
- 3 If you are not enrolled in VA health care, you can apply at any time.

(cont.)

Aside from meeting the requirements for health care coverage, starting a health care relationship now with the VA makes good sense, as VA health care can help keep you healthy and provide peace-of-mind to you and your loved ones in the future.

The VA Medical Center in **St. Cloud** and our three outpatient clinics in **Brainerd**, **Montevideo**, and **Alexandria**, deliver great health care to 37,000 Veterans and receive high ratings for quality and patient satisfaction. We focus on keeping Veterans healthy and stand ready to serve you.

If you are already enrolled, ensure you schedule at least one annual exam every year to keep your enrollment current. If you have not applied for enrollment you may be missing out on a very valuable benefit. All it takes to apply is a completed application (for 1010EZ) and a copy of your **DD 214** and **insurance card(s)**. You can apply online at: [www.stcloud.va.gov/patients/eligibility.asp](http://www.stcloud.va.gov/patients/eligibility.asp). You may also contact your County Veteran Service Officer for assistance.

For help in completing the form please call (320) 255-6340. Once we receive the application we'll provide you a decision in a few days.

## Fast Facts

MNSure (our state health insurance exchange) is available for consumers through March, 2014. The ACA's individual mandate requires "minimum essential coverage" Jan. 1, 2014, or penalties apply.

VA health care meets "minimum essential coverage" requirements for Veterans. *Enrolled Veterans are covered, and ACA does not change any Veterans' eligibility for VA care*

Under ACA, Veterans have choices:

-Can sign up for private health insurance on government exchanges (MNSure)

-Non-enrolled Veterans may be eligible for premium tax credits and cost sharing reductions

-Enrolled Veterans may sign up for coverage on exchanges as a supplement; however these Veterans cannot get premium tax credits.

-May be eligible for expanded Medicaid. (incomes below 138% of Federal Poverty Level, or \$15, 856 in 2013)

**Veterans enrolled at VA who have other forms of health coverage, such as Medicare, TRICARE, or private insurance plans, can continue to use VA alongside these plans.**

## 2014 Physically Disabled Veterans Turkey Hunt

The 10th Annual Physically Disabled Veterans Turkey Hunt is scheduled for May 6-8, 2014, at Camp Ripley near Little Falls.

Veterans interested in participating should contact Dennis Erie at (320) 255-6365, for application instructions.

This special hunt is provided for physically disabled veterans who are currently receiving outpatient care or are eligible to receive health care from the VA and cannot hunt during the regular firearms season.

The Physically Disabled Veterans Turkey Hunt is a joint effort of the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota National Guard, Camp Ripley, and is sponsored by the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and their respective Auxiliaries.



A successful Physically Disabled Veterans Turkey Hunt in 2011.



To apply,  
call Dennis Erie  
at (320) 255-6365

# Energy Assistance Program

The **Energy Assistance Program** (EAP) helps pay home heating costs and furnace repairs for income-qualified households.

EAP is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Grants are:

- Available for renters or homeowners
- For households with income at or below 50 percent of the state median income
- Based on household size, income, fuel type and energy usage

## Services may include:

- Payment of energy bills
- Help with utility disconnections or necessary fuel deliveries.
- Education on efficient and safe use of home heating energy.
- Advocacy with energy suppliers and human service providers on behalf of consumers.
- Repair or replacement of homeowners' malfunctioning heating systems.

## How to apply for assistance:

- [View the EAP eligibility guidelines](#) to see if you might be eligible.
- Call 1-800-657-3710 to have your local EAP provider send you an application.
- Or you can [complete one of the applications](#) and mail it to your local EAP provider. Find your local EAP provider [by viewing the list here](#).



## Audiology Clinic Expansion Almost Complete

The expansion of the Audiology Clinic is almost complete, and a dedication and ribbon-cutting event is scheduled for 9 a.m. on February 3, 2014. The new clinic will improve access for hearing evaluations and decrease wait times for appointments.

Project overview:

- 2,800 square foot, single-story addition to the existing Audiology Department in Building 29.
- Remodels approximately 1,800 square feet of existing space.
- Removes three existing audiology booths and replaces them with six new, more accessible audiology booths.
- Adds five more rooms to be used for exam, fitting of hearing aides and office space.

Construction began in June 2011. The project was scheduled in several phases, and the new audiology booths have been in service for several months.



**The expansion has increased the amount and size of the booths.**

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## Expanded Benefits for Traumatic Brain Injury

### ***Five Illnesses Related to Service-Connected TBI Added***

Some Veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI) who are diagnosed with any of five other ailments will have an easier path to receive additional disability pay under new regulations developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The new regulation impacts some Veterans living with TBI who also have Parkinson's disease, certain types of dementia, depression, unprovoked seizures or certain diseases of the hypothalamus and pituitary glands.

The new regulations, printed in the *Federal Register*, say that if certain Veterans with service-connected TBI also have one of the five illnesses, then the second illness will also be considered as service connected for the calculation of VA disability compensation.

Eligibility for expanded benefits will depend upon the severity of the TBI and the time between the injury causing the TBI and the onset of the second illness. However, Veterans can still file a claim to establish direct service-connection for these ailments even if they do not meet the time and severity standards in the new regulation.

Veterans who have questions or who wish to file new disability claims may use the eBenefits website, available at [www.eBenefits.va.gov](http://www.eBenefits.va.gov), or contact their County Veteran Service Officer.



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**Smokers: Planning for a new year and a new smoke-free you? Talk with your VA provider, or call 1-855-QUIT-VET to speak with a smoking cessation counselor who will help you make a quit plan.**

# **Call the quitline today 1-855-QUIT-VET**

**Quitting smoking is the single best thing  
you can do to improve your health.**

**You have the power to quit smoking  
and to stay smoke free, and the VA  
has resources available to help.**



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## Veterans to Receive 1.5 Percent COLA Increase

### *New Rates for Compensation and Pension Benefits in 2014*

Veterans, their families and survivors receiving disability compensation and pension benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs will receive a 1.5 percent cost-of-living increase in their monthly payments beginning Jan. 1, 2014.

For the first time, payments will not be rounded down to the nearest dollar. Until this year, that was required by law. Veterans and survivors will see additional cents included in their monthly compensation benefit payment.

For Veterans without dependents, the new compensation rates will range from \$130.94 monthly for a disability rated at 10 percent to \$2,858.24 monthly for 100 percent. The full rates are available on the Internet at [www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/rates-index.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/rates-index.asp).

The COLA increase also applies to disability and death pension recipients, survivors receiving dependency and indemnity compensation, disabled Veterans receiving automobile and clothing allowances, and other benefits.

Under federal law, cost-of-living adjustments for VA's compensation and pension must match those for Social Security benefits. The last adjustment was in January 2013 when the Social Security benefits rate increased 1.7 percent.

For Veterans and separating Servicemembers who plan to file an electronic disability claim, VA urges them to use the joint DoD/VA online portal, *eBenefits*. Registered *eBenefits* users with a premium account can file a claim online, track the status, and access a variety of other benefits, including pension, education, health care, home loan eligibility, and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.

For more information about VA benefits, visit [www.benefits.va.gov](http://www.benefits.va.gov), or call 1-800-827-1000.

## New Dental Plan Available for Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides comprehensive dental care to Veterans who meet eligibility standards; however, the benefit is not available to many Veterans.

VA's new Dental Insurance Program (VADIP) offers enrolled Veterans and beneficiaries of VA's Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA) the opportunity to purchase dental insurance at a reduced cost.

VADIP is a three-year, national pilot program to assess the feasibility and advisability of providing a premium-based dental insurance plan to eligible individuals.

### **Eligibility for VADIP**

Veterans enrolled in the VA health care program and CHAMPVA program beneficiaries are eligible to participate in

VADIP. Participation in VADIP will not affect Veterans' eligibility for VA dental services and treatment.

Dependents of Veterans, except those eligible under CHAMPVA, are not eligible for VADIP; however, separate coverage options may be offered dependents by the insurance carrier.

### **Dental Plan Information**

VA has contracted with Delta Dental and MetLife, private insurers, to administer the dental insurance program. Beginning November 15, 2013, individuals interested in participating in VADIP may complete an application online, over the phone or by mail. A direct link to each provider's VADIP webpage is available from [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/VADIP](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/VADIP). *(continued next page)*



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*(continued)*

Coverage under VADIP begins January 1, 2014, and will be provided throughout the United States and its territories. The initial participation period will be at least 12 calendar months. Afterward, VADIP beneficiaries can renew their participation for another 12-month period or be covered month-to-month, as long as the participant remains eligible for coverage and VA continues VADIP.

Multiple plan options will allow participants to select a plan that provides benefits and premiums that meet their dental needs and budget. The offered plans vary and may include diagnostic, preventative, surgical, emergency and endodontic/restorative treatment. Each participant will pay a fixed monthly premium for coverage, in addition to any copayments required by his or her plan.

For more information on VADIP, visit [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/VADIP](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/VADIP) and click the insurer's link for specific information regarding registration, rates and services, or call Delta Dental at 1-855-370-3303 or MetLife at 1-888-310-1681.

For local information and assistance about the dental insurance program or other VA benefits Veterans should contact their County Veteran Service Officer. Contact information can be found at [www.macvso.org/directory.aspx](http://www.macvso.org/directory.aspx), or in the county government section of local phone books.



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## Montevideo CBOC Caregiver Support Group to begin January 2014

A Caregiver support group is set to begin at the Montevideo Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in January 2014. The group will be held at the Montevideo CBOC and facilitated by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System Caregiver Support Coordinator, Jess Behrends.

The format of the group will involve an educational component as well as an opportunity for Caregivers to share their experiences with one another. Group topics will be guided by needs and recommendations of the group members.

The Yellow Medicine County Veteran Service Officer plans to provide transportation for Caregivers to attend this group if they would like. You can contact the VSO office for more information at: (320)-313-3038.

This group will be held monthly on the 2nd Friday from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Caregivers of Veterans from all generations and eras are encouraged to attend and benefit from the experiences of other Caregivers.

The first group meeting will be held on January 10, 2014 at 1:30 p.m.

### ***Group Information:***

- *2nd Friday of the month beginning January 10, 2014*
- *1:30-2:30 p.m.*
- *Montevideo CBOC*



# Experience Health for Life

**Does your health matter to you?** At the St. Cloud VA, our goal is to assist you in establishing your own personal health plan which enables health and well-being so that you can pursue everything else that matters to you!

*Health for Life Tips* on Facebook is designed to provide you convenient health coaching and support messages and reminders on a wide variety of topics in support of your health goals.

It's free... "like" us on Facebook to help you stay healthy!

[www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS](http://www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS)

## Stay healthy!

*Like us to learn how!*



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## Nine Things To Do Today to Stay Healthy

**Be Involved In Your Health Care:** Take an active role-Work with your health care team to improve your health

**Be Tobacco Free:** Quitting smoking is the single most important thing you can do to improve your health-Don't use tobacco in any form

**Eat Wisely:** Eat a variety of foods including fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains-Limit salt, fat, sugar and alcohol

**Be Physically Active:** Avoid inactivity. Aim for at least 2 ½ hours of aerobic activity each week

**Strive for a Healthy Weight:** If you need to lose weight, losing even a little will help-If you are normal weight, congratulations, maintain it

**Limit Alcohol:** If you choose to drink, limit to no more than 1 drink a day for women, 2 drinks a day for men-Avoid "binge drinking"

**Get Recommended Screening Tests and Immunizations:** Recommendations for screening tests depend on your age, gender, health status and family history-Ask which screening tests and immunizations are recommended for you

**Manage Stress:** Learn how to recognize stress and pay attention to stress-Learn ways to help you manage and reduce stress

**Be Safe:** Find out how to prevent sexually transmitted infections, falls and motor vehicle crashes-Take action to protect yourself, and those you love, from harm.

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# *A Recipe for Health*

## Chicken Lasagna

### *Ingredients*

1 T. canola oil	5 C. chicken, cubed
1/2 c. onion, chopped	8-oz. Box lasagna noodles
1 c. fat-free cottage cheese	1/3 c. Parmesan cheese
1/2 tsp. ground black pepper	1/3 c. Miracle Whip lite
1 clove garlic, minced	3 c. fat-free shredded mozzarella cheese
1 can cream of chicken soup	
1 can cream of mushroom soup	
1 c. sour cream	

### *Directions*

Preheat oven to 350°. Cook chicken, onions and garlic in frying pan with oil. Mix Parmesan cheese, pepper, cottage cheese, sour cream, Miracle Whip and soups in mixing bowl. Add cooked chicken mixture. Boil noodles as directed on box. In a 9 X 13-inch pan (lightly sprayed with Pam cooking spray), make a layer with 4 noodles, then layer 1/3 chicken mixture and 1 cup mozzarella cheese; repeat layers (3 layers total). Bake, covered, with tin foil for 45 minutes; let cool 10 minutes. Serves 12.

Nutritional Information: 293 calories, 31.1g protein, 51.1mg sodium, 24.6g carbohydrates.



## *Just think - no more phone tag!*

With Secure Messaging thru My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet, you can contact your VA Healthcare team without waiting on hold or playing phone tag. Secure Messaging is as easy to use as email, but completely safe and secure. It's great for non-urgent communication and general healthcare-related questions.

**No Waiting on Hold!**  
**No Waiting for a Call Back!**  
**Don't Delay, Opt-in Today!**

### How to use Secure Messaging:

- 1) Log into your My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet account at: [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)  
(Forgot your User ID or Password? Simply click on the 'Forgot User ID' or 'Forgot Password' link directly below the sign in box. Note, you only need to answer one of the two security questions that will appear.)
- 2) Select "Secure Messaging" on the top navigation bar, then click on the orange "Open Secure Messaging" tab in the middle of the screen.
- 3) If it's the first time you're accessing your Secure Messaging inbox, you will need to read the terms and conditions and select 'Opt In'.



- 4) Click 'New Message' and your provider's name will automatically be in the "To" line of the message.

We hope you take advantage of Secure Messaging. If you have any questions about Secure Messaging or My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet, please contact me via phone or email. I'll be happy to explain this time-saving tool.

You can also stop by my office during your next visit to the St. Cloud VA and I'll help you get on-track with Secure Messaging and many of the other great tools and features of My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet.



**Brian Vetter**  
**My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet Coordinator**  
**St. Cloud VA Health Care System**  
**Phone: 320-252-1670, dial 9 then ext: 7335**





## *Take care of your buddy!*

Help a fellow Veteran enroll  
for VA healthcare.  
Contact your County Veteran  
Service Officer, call the St.  
Cloud VA at 320-255-6340,  
or apply online at  
[www.1010ez.med.va.gov](http://www.1010ez.med.va.gov)

[www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS](http://www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS)



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