

St. Cloud VA

UPDATE

May 22, 2020



A monthly newsletter for Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, and for those who serve them. 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

St. Cloud Area Metropolitan Veterans Council to Conduct Memorial Day Honors Ceremony

In lieu of the traditional Memorial Day observance ceremony on the St. Cloud VA Campus, the St. Cloud Metropolitan Veterans Council is conducting an honors ceremony at the Minnesota Veterans Plaza at the Municipal Athletic Complex, in St. Cloud, at 11 a.m. on Monday, May 25.

Due to ongoing precautions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the public is asked to stay at home and to pause for a moment on Memorial Day, to honor those who have died in their nation's defense and to keep the true meaning and spirit of Memorial Day alive.

The honors ceremony will be streamed live on the St. Cloud VA Facebook page, available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS/>

From the HCS Director: Moving Forward Together—Planning Underway, But Not Ready to Implement

The safety of Veterans and staff is the highest priority when we consider how we provide health care services and procedures during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

While many states and private-sector health care organizations are loosening restrictions and changing practices, I want to emphasize that the current conditions in our area do not allow us to move forward to expand services.

As of May 21, Minnesota has had over 18,000 positive COVID-19 cases, and over 800 deaths. In short, COVID-19 is yet to peak in Minnesota, or in our local areas—there is still a lot of disease out there.

In reintroducing services, VISNs and VA medical centers will consider unique circumstances of their state and local markets, environmental safety preparedness and clinical risk assessments. VHA has developed a risk-

based framework and plan—called Moving Forward Together-- to prioritize non-urgent procedures in addition to the urgent procedures currently being performed. Evaluation of such factors as patient health, staff safety and resource considerations will guide expansion, scheduling decisions and which services will be reintroduced.

Using this framework, on May 18, VHA began implementing a phased approach to reintroducing select health care services at one Lead Site in each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN). In VISN 23, the VA Midwest Health Care Network selected the Fargo VA HCS as the Lead Site. The lessons learned from these initial sites will help to inform how other facilities plan for expanding services in their facilities.

Again, as I stated before, there is no change to St. Cloud VA HCS operations, and we do not have a timeline for transitioning away for our current operations. Safe care remains our goal.

We will continue our rigorous safety measures including employee and Veteran COVID-19 screening, physical distancing and appropriate personal protective attire such as face coverings. In caring for Veterans, we will continue to maximize the personalized virtual care options of telehealth, phone consults and wellness checks, as these services have been a valuable link to Veterans during this challenging time.

Our St. Cloud VA team—Veterans, families and employees--has done a magnificent job with COVID-19 response activities and keeping each other safe, and we are not yet done. Stay vigilant and stay safe. With the holiday weekend coming I want to remind everyone of the continuing need to keep

yourself and your families safe. The holiday I speak of is, of course, Memorial Day. The local Veterans group who sponsors the annual ceremony here has elected to move off-campus to the adjacent Minnesota Veterans Plaza and hold a small, socially distanced honors ceremony. They too, are doing their part to keep everyone safe.

Regarding Memorial Day, I also want to remind everyone to pause to honor the sacrifices that make our freedom possible. There are no words adequate to console those who have lost a loved one serving our country, however, President Lincoln's letter to a mother who lost five sons during the Civil War still resonates today:

Dear Madam, I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Thank you for your continuing service and commitment to staying safe. It remains our honor to serve you.

Respectfully,
Brent

BRENT A. THELEN, PhD
Health Care System Director

St. Cloud VA HCS Awarded Top Honor for Leadership in Health Care Sustainability

In recognition for continuing achievement and innovation in health care sustainability, on May 20 the St. Cloud VA Health Care System received the Top 25 Environmental Excellence Award from Practice Greenhealth, the nation's leading organization dedicated to environmental sustainability in health care. The award is one of the 25 Environmental Excellence Awards given each year to honor environmental achievements in the health care sector.

This is the fifth consecutive year that the St. Cloud VA has earned the Top 25 distinction.

"In a shifting health care landscape, a focus on sustainability can help build resilience while better protecting the health of patients and the community," said Gary Cohen, Practice Greenhealth founder. "The St. Cloud VA HCS demonstrates the kind of leadership, innovation, and performance that can drive the entire health sector toward more environmentally responsible practices."

The 25 hospitals presented with Practice Greenhealth's highest honors exemplify environmental excellence and are setting the highest standards for environmental practices in health care. Award winners are leading the industry with innovation in sustainability—and have the data and documentation to prove their success. Each year, the competition for these top spots increases as hospitals across the country continue to innovate.

"Our employees and teams are dedicated to our high reliability journey, and our green culture is one more way to ensure that our Veterans receive world class care," said St. Cloud VA Director Brent Thelen.

Recycling, waste reduction, organics composting, paper conservation, green purchasing, laundry water reuse, LED lighting, renewable energy systems, electric utility vehicles, and use of green space for healthy activities all demonstrate the St. Cloud VA's commitment to environmental excellence and its dedication to continuous improvement, systematically achieving incremental changes in processes to improve efficiency and quality.

"In recent years, we have made great strides toward reducing our impact on the environment, and we are committed to doing even more. Sustainability efforts lead to operational cost savings so that we can make additional resources available for Veteran care," said Thelen.

Award winners are chosen among hospital applicants that have the highest scores on the Greenhealth Partner for Change application. Each year, the competition for these top spots increases, as a growing number of facilities are implementing creative, sustainable and implementable practices.

St. Cloud VA Earns Numerous Circle of Excellence Awards

The St. Cloud VA also was recognized in four out of 10 categories with Circle of Excellence Awards. The Circles of Excellence honor up to 10 of the highest performing

hospitals nationwide in each area of sustainability expertise.

These awards highlight hospitals that are pushing the envelope and driving innovation in sustainability performance in each sustainability category. There can be up to 10 designees selected for each Circle of Excellence category.

The St. Cloud VA received Circle of Excellence honors in the following categories:

- **Greening the OR:** This category honors hospitals for leadership in implementation and innovation in the surgical department. Winners have demonstrated innovative approaches to waste minimization, clinical plastic recycling, reformulation of operating room kits, single-use device reprocessing, use of reusable sterilization cases, and a range of other programs and associated metrics.
- **Energy:** This category celebrates hospitals that are leading the sector in energy efficiency and strategic energy use planning. Leaders generally have energy managers and written programs to reduce energy use over time. They are tracking energy use intensity and ENERGY STAR performance metrics and sharing details on comprehensive project implementation and staff engagement strategies.
- **Water:** This category recognizes hospitals for exemplary programs in

water conservation and efficiency. These early adopters boast fewer gallons of water consumption per square foot, tracking of implemented conservation projects, written plans to reduce water consumption over time and have water-tracking mechanisms in place.

- **Environmentally Preferable Purchasing:** This category celebrates the best in environmentally preferable purchasing programs. Facilities are evaluated on their supporting policies, interactions with suppliers, environmentally preferable contracts and use of environmental attributes in requests for proposals and business reviews.

About Practice Greenhealth

Practice Greenhealth is the nation's leading health care membership community whose mission is to transform health care worldwide so that it reduces its environmental footprint, becomes a community anchor for sustainability and is a leader in the global movement for environmental health and justice. To learn more about Practice Greenhealth visit:

www.practicegreenhealth.org

Governor Walz Orders Flags Flown at Half-Staff in Honor of Minnesotans Who Have Lost Their Lives Due to COVID-19

Governor Tim Walz has directed all flags at state and federal buildings in Minnesota to be flown at half-staff from sunrise to sunset on Tuesday, May 19, 2020 and on the 19th of every month through 2020 to remember, mourn, and honor lives lost due to COVID-19.

“As of May 15, 2020, 683 of our mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, friends and neighbors, have passed due to COVID-19,” reads the proclamation issued by Governor Walz. “Minnesotans come together as one community in these challenging moments to mourn and support each other.”

“This disease is unpredictable and has devastated so many Minnesota families, including my own,” said Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. “The people who have been lost are not just numbers, and they are not forgotten.”

Individuals, businesses, and other organizations also are encouraged to join in lowering their flags to honor Minnesotans who have lost their lives to COVID-19 and their families.

Governor Walz's full proclamation can be viewed [here](#).

St. Cloud VA HCS offers Telephone Lifestyle Coaching for Veterans.

Health care providers at the St. Cloud VA and surrounding CBOCs have a new way to

support Veterans and offer effective lifestyle coaching virtually, so they don't have to visit the medical center. Telephone Lifestyle Coaching, or TLC, is a program designed to support Veterans by assisting them to improve health behaviors that impact their overall health and wellbeing. Veterans can speak with TLC coaches on the telephone when and where they want. TLC coaches are skilled in helping Veterans identify their reasons to change, as well as creating action plans to help them meet their goals. Veterans who have experienced TLC say the coaches also offer a source of accountability, which keeps them engaged and motivated.

Veterans may choose to work on one or more of the following healthy living goals:

- Eating Wisely
- Being Physically Active
- Managing Stress
- Limiting Alcohol
- Striving for a Healthy Weight
- Being Tobacco Free*

(*Tobacco cessation coaching provided via a partnership with the VA Quitline, 1-855-QUIT-VET)

To start the program, Veterans simply need to let their health care team know they would like to enroll

Participating Veterans receive ten scheduled coaching calls and can call in to their coach anytime during their participation if they need additional support. Apart from Federal holidays, coaches are available from 7 a.m. to midnight, Monday through Friday, and from 7a.m. -5 p.m. on Saturday. Most calls last less than 30 minutes. TLC is a great way for Veterans to access highly effective lifestyle

coaching when and where they want it. For more information on Telephone Lifestyle Coaching, visit www.prevention.va.gov/tlc

VA releases new COVID Coach mobile app

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced the launch of the COVID Coach app, a new mobile app designed to help both Veterans and civilians cope with feelings of stress and anxiety they may be experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The app includes practical tools, information and resources that can all be used from the safety of one's home to track well-being, mood swings and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms.

A personal goal setting tracker can help users work toward achieving small victories. The mindfulness and sleep tools can be helpful for improving mental health and well-being. The indoor activities tool and staying healthy recommendations have been specifically tailored to the current COVID-19 situation.

Direct links to resources are available within the app for those who may need additional professional support. The COVID Coach can be used independently or while engaged in mental health treatment but is not intended to replace needed professional care.

[Download](#) the app on iOS and Android devices or from [VA's Mobile App Store](#).

Contact MobileMentalHealth@va.gov regarding questions about COVID Coach.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Federal Holiday

Monday, May 25

Outpatient clinics and administrative offices, including VA Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed. Urgent Care at the St. Cloud VA will be open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Veterans Affairs Radio Show

Monday, June 1 8:10 -8:30 a.m.
KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3

Appointments by phone only: Veteran's Law Clinic

Tuesday, June 2 Noon -2 p.m.
Free legal consultation for Veterans by appointment only. This clinic is not for criminal issues. For more information or to schedule an appointment please contact Central Minnesota Legal Services at 320-257-4855 or 800-622-7773.

Appointments by phone only: Veteran's Law Clinic

Tuesday, June 16 Noon -2 p.m.
Free legal consultation for Veterans by appointment only. This clinic is not for criminal issues. For more information or to schedule an appointment please contact Central Minnesota Legal Services at 320-257-4855 or 800-622-7773.

Voices for Veterans Radio Show

Wednesday, June 17 8:10-830 a.m.
WJON AM 1240

For a complete Calendar of Events, go to <https://www.stcloud.va.gov/calendar.asp>

Quick Reference Phone List

Main St. Cloud VA HCS Phone Number	320-252-1670 or 800-247-1739
TDD User	320-255-6450
Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Alexandria	320-759-2640
Brainerd VA Clinic	218-855-1115
Montevideo VA Clinic	320-269-2222
Veterans Crisis Line	800-273-8255 Press 1
Homeless Veteran Hotline	877- 424-3838

Billing:

- VA Care 866-347-2352
- Care in the Community (non-VA care) 877-881-7618

Caregiver Support Team	Ext. 7283
Chaplain Service	Ext. 6386
Community Care Referrals	Ext. 6401
Discrimination Complaints	Ext. 6304
Eligibility	Ext. 6340
Nutrition Clinic	Ext. 6376
Transition & Care Management Program	Ext. 6453
Patient Advocate	Ext. 6353
Pharmacy Refill Line	855-560-1724
Privacy Officer	Ext. 6408
Public Affairs Office	Ext. 6353
Release of Information (Medical Records)	Ext. 6336
Transportation	Ext. 7622
TRICARE	844-866-9378
Voluntary Service	Ext. 6365
VA Police	Ext. 6355

Stay in Touch

Visit our Website: www.stcloud.va.gov

Like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS

Visit us on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/stcloudvahcs/>

Sign up for our automated email service. Visit the St. Cloud VA Website at: <http://www.stcloud.va.gov> and on the right-hand side of the page is a request to sign up for email updates. Enter your email address and you are automatically signed up to receive email updates from our web page.