

## **Military and Veterans Affairs Committee Fact Sheet**

**New Mexico VA Health Care System Website:** <http://www.albuquerque.va.gov/>

The Artesia CBOC provides primary medical and mental health care services to eligible Veterans.

**Hours of Operation:** Monday through Friday, 8:00am-4:30pm; Closed Federal holidays

**Other Pertinent Information:** Emergency Care Services are not available; No walk-in appointments available; Call (575) 746-3531 for appointments

**Primary Medical Care:** Primary care includes management of chronic and acute disease processes, information on healthy living, prevention and screening for serious illness such as diabetes, mental illness, cancer and heart disease.

**Currently serve approximately 1,950 Veterans; Capacity for 2,700 Veterans**

### **Access to Primary Care and Mental Health Services**

Primary Care appointments are available within 14 days at the Artesia VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). Appointments can be scheduled up to 90 days in advance.

For acute needs, a nurse is available to speak with the Veteran by phone to evaluate needs. The Primary Care Provider can also speak with the Veteran by phone to evaluate needs. Acute appointments are available daily based upon assessed needs.

At the Artesia VA CBOC mental health related appointments with the Social Worker are available within 14 days. Mental health urgent needs can be assessed by phone by the CBOC Social Worker within 24-48 hours. Mental health emergencies are handled immediately.

A psychiatrist goes to the clinic three days per month to provide on-site medication management. Psychotherapy evaluation and medication management via telemental health is also offered.

Veterans can schedule an appointment for laboratory draw(s) by calling the Artesia VA CBOC at 575-746-3531 and requesting a laboratory appointment. Labs are drawn in the morning for shipping to Albuquerque for processing by the Medical Center lab. Lab appointments can be scheduled up to 90 days in advance.

For Veterans with an appointment in Albuquerque, it is best to have the lab draw completed at the Artesia VA CBOC 5-7 days in advance to assure the results are processed and available within the electronic Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) for the future visit in Albuquerque. When the Veteran calls for the lab appointment, the specific lab orders can be reviewed to assure the labs can be drawn at the Artesia CBOC or if the Veteran will be sent for fee basis draw. For a fee basis draw, allow for a minimum of 7 days for results to be received and scanned into CPRS. Lab appointments can be made up to 90 days in advance.

### **Access to Fee Care**

NMVAHCS authorizes Fee Care according to Federal rules and regulations. A Veteran must be eligible for fee care. Specialty care is considered for fee basis when there is medical justification that suggests that travel may produce deleterious health effects that negate the benefits of the service provided. Veterans should discuss their medical needs with their primary care team. If, after evaluation by the physician, there is a documented medical opinion that travel may produce harmful health effects that negate the benefits of the service provided, fee basis care will be considered. These decisions must be made on a case by case basis and will take into account the health of the Veteran and the service requested.

### **VA Support for Organized Veterans Transportation System**

Since 1987, the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), with the support of VA Voluntary Service (VAVS), has staffed and funded a nationwide DAV volunteer-based transportation network. In these instances, DAV Departments and/or Chapters have donated vehicles to VA medical facilities. There is currently not a DAV van in the Artesia/Roswell area.

The efforts of the SENM Veterans Transportation Network are greatly appreciated. This program operates without VA support. The NMVAHCS has explored options for VA support on numerous occasions for this transportation program. One concept that is not a legally viable option is having Veterans ride the SENM van, collect mileage reimbursement from NMVAHCS, and reimburse the van transportation program. Specific VA regulations prohibit this. The NMVAHCS does request a list of individuals riding with the van transportation program for this reason.

### **Frail or Homebound Veterans**

Case Management is available through the Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) at the Artesia VA CBOC to provide assistance with care planning needs for frail and homebound Veterans requiring specialty care at the VA Medical Center in Albuquerque. The Team includes the Primary Care Provider, Registered Nurse, Health Technician, and Medical Support Assistant. The Social Worker may also be involved in case management. The Veteran would discuss their concerns for travel with their primary care team. The primary point of contact to begin the discussion would be the primary care team Registered Nurse. If, after evaluation by the physician, there is a documented medical opinion that travel may produce deleterious health effects that negate the benefits of the service provided, fee basis care will be considered.

Home-Based Primary Care (long-term primary care to chronically ill Veterans in their own homes) is not available for Veterans receiving care with the Artesia VA CBOC. Home Telehealth services are available as an adjunct to primary care. Currently 71 Veterans from the Artesia VA CBOC receive this type of care. Veterans should discuss their medical needs with their primary care team. Additionally, for Veterans who meet program eligibility criteria, skilled home care nursing, Home Health Aide/Homemaker (HHA/HM), and in-home respite services are available through a fee basis mechanism. Veterans should discuss their medical needs with their primary care team. If, after evaluation by the physician, there is documentation that the Veteran meets program eligibility criteria and that skilled home nursing care, HHA/HM, in-home respite or Home Telehealth services should be considered, the physician will generate a referral to be evaluated by Geriatrics & Extended Care Service and Integrated Care.

NMVAHCS utilizes VistaCare for local Hospice. They are located at 400 North Pennsylvania Avenue, Roswell, NM 8820. Phone number is (575) 627-1145. Veterans should discuss their medical needs with their primary care team. If, after evaluation by the physician, there is a documented medical opinion that Hospice services should be considered, the physician will generate a referral to be evaluated by Geriatrics & Extended Care Service and Integrated Care.

### **Urgent Care Access**

Except in a life-threatening emergency, a Veteran should first seek care through the VA primary care clinic in Artesia. For acute needs, a nurse is available to speak with the Veteran by phone to evaluate needs. The Primary Care Provider can also either speak with the Veteran by phone to evaluate needs or schedule a same day appointment. Acute appointments are available daily based upon assessed needs.

If it is determined that emergent services are required that cannot be performed at the Artesia VA CBOC, the Veteran may be referred to seek care locally. Fee-basis arrangements exist with all community hospitals and

emergency rooms in the Artesia catchment area. Depending on the clinical situation, the Veteran may instead be referred to the VA Medical Center in Albuquerque.

### **Emergency Care Access**

In a life-threatening emergency, a Veteran should seek care locally. In the case of medical emergencies, NMVAHCS may reimburse or pay for emergency non-VA medical care not previously authorized that is provided to certain eligible Veterans when VA care is not feasibly available. This benefit is dependent on other conditions, such as notification to VA, the nature of treatment sought, the status of the Veteran, the presence of other healthcare insurance, and third party liability. Because there are different regulatory requirements that may affect VA payment and Veteran liability for the cost of care, it is very important that the NMVAHCS be notified as soon as possible after emergency treatment is sought. If emergency inpatient services are required, NMVAHCS will assist in transferring the Veteran to the VA Medical Center in Albuquerque, if available.

A Veteran's eligibility for payment for emergent care is outlined in Federal law and regulation, including 38 USC 1728, 1703, 1725, 17.120 and 12.52. In all cases, the Veteran or the facility providing the care is required to notify the NMVAHCS of care received in non-VA facilities within 72 hours. To notify NMVAHCS of non-VA care, please call 800-465-8262, press 1, and extension 5739 during business hours or 800-465-8262, press 1, and extension 2740 during evenings, weekends, and holidays.

### **Special Veteran Population Resources**

Patient Advocate - Elizabeth Howard, Program Specialist at 800-465-8262, press 1, then extension 5406. The primary contact locally at the Artesia VA CBOC - Mark Rhein, Social Worker (SW) at 575-746-3531.

**Women Veterans Program Manager** - Carole Donsbach, RN at 800-465-8262, press 1, and extension 2679. At the Artesia VA CBOC, Women Veterans would contact their primary care team at 575-746-3531. The nurse contact locally - Julie Jenkins, Staff RN, at 575-746-3531.

**OIF/OEF/OND Program Manager** - Melissa Middleton at 800-465-8262, press 1, then extension 6425. Veterans would contact their primary care team at 575-746-3531. Mark Rhein, SW could also be contacted at Artesia VA CBOC at 575-746-3531.

**Homeless Program Manager** - Mark Rhein, SW, Artesia VA CBOC at 575-746-3531 is the contact locally. The Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program Coordinator in Albuquerque is David Sena at 800-465-8262, press 1, and extension 2784.

### **After Hours, Toll Free Advice Nurse Line: 1-866-862-7863**

### **Dental Services <http://www.va.gov/dental/infoforpts.asp>**

Dental-related eligibility questions can be answered by calling NMVAHCS' Eligibility and Benefits Office during regular business hours at 800-465-8262, press 1, and extension 2741.

Eligibility for VA dental benefits is based on very specific guidelines and differs significantly from eligibility requirements for medical care.

- Veterans that have a service-connected compensable dental disability or condition.
- Typically, Veterans who are rated 100% service-connected disabled, are eligible for comprehensive dental care.
- Also, Veterans who are rated at least 60% service-connected disabled and are deemed unemployable are eligible for comprehensive dental care.

- Occasionally, Veterans have medical conditions that may be aggravated by an oral infection. These Veterans may be eligible for limited dental care to eliminate the oral infection. A consult request is required from the Veteran's primary care provider in order to access VA dental services.
- Recently discharged Veterans (including activated Reservists and members of the National Guard) from active duty in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, have 120 days from the date of discharge to apply for dental benefits.

**The New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) provides a full range of dental services for eligible Veterans including:**

- Regularly scheduled cleaning and x-rays
- Restorative procedures such as fillings, crowns, and bridges.
- Comfortable, well-fitting dentures.
- Oral surgery such as tooth extractions.
- Access to oral and facial reconstruction surgery resulting from trauma or serious illness.

**NMVAHCS dental staff includes five general dentists, a prosthodontist, a periodontist, an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, four dental hygienists and support staff.**

- The Dental Service is open Monday through Friday from 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM.
- Appointments for eligible Veterans can be scheduled by calling: 1-800-465-8262, option 5, and then option 4.
- Veterans (eligible for NMVAHCS dental services) requiring emergency dental care should consider going to a dentist close to where they live.
- First contact the Dental Service (1-800-465-8262, option 5, and then option 4) for an authorization for fee dental service.
- Authorization is required prior to actually having the emergency dental treatment performed by the non-VA dentist.

**It is possible for eligible Veterans to have dental care provided by a non-VA dentist in their local area.**

- Pre-authorization for any dental visit is required.
- Typically, the non-VA dentist will first perform an oral exam and create a treatment plan.
- The treatment plan is reviewed by the Chief of the NMVAHCS Dental Service and the authorization is completed.
- Some of the dental treatment may need to be completed at the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque due to the complex nature of the treatment.

**Eye and Vision Care Services**

VA medical services include diagnostic and preventive eye care services. Veterans should discuss their eye care needs with their primary care team at the Artesia VA CBOC.

- Veterans with diabetes receive diabetes-related screening eye care in the Artesia VA CBOC by the Teleretinal Imaging Screening Program. Images are taken in the clinic and forwarded to VA eye care specialists. Follow-up care recommendations are determined by the specialist and communicated to the Veteran's primary care provider.
- Where eye care services are delivered, and by whom, depends on the type of eye care services that are needed.
- Some eye care may need to be completed at the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque due to the complex nature of the evaluation and treatment.
- To the extent possible, routine vision testing and preventive eye care services (refraction examinations) may be offered in the local community under the fee basis program.

**VA will issue prescription eyeglasses to the following Veterans:**

- Those with any compensable service-connected disability.
- Those who are former Prisoners of War (POWs).
- Those who were awarded a Purple Heart.
- Those in receipt of benefits under Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 1151
- Those in receipt of increased pension based on being permanently housebound and in need of regular aid and attendance.
- Those with vision impairment resulting from diseases or the existence of another medical condition for which the Veteran is receiving care or services from VHA, or which resulted from treatment of that medical condition, for example stroke, polytrauma, traumatic brain injury, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, vascular disease, geriatric chronic illnesses, toxicity from drugs, ocular photosensitivity from drugs, cataract surgery, and/or other surgeries performed on the eye, ear, or brain resulting in vision impairment.
- Those with significant functional or cognitive impairment evidenced by deficiencies in the ability to perform activities of daily living.
- Those who have vision impairment severe enough that it interferes with their ability to participate actively in their own medical treatment (for example reading medication labels), and to reduce the impact of dual sensory impairment (combined hearing loss and vision loss).
- Those Veterans who have service-connected vision disabilities rated zero percent.

**Non-service connected Veterans on the basis of medical need.**

- Veterans must be receiving care with the NMVAHCS, usually at the Artesia VA CBOC. Veterans should discuss their vision needs with their primary care team.
- All such Veterans (including Medal of Honor recipients who do not have entitling conditions or circumstances and catastrophically disable Veterans) must receive an appropriate evaluation by an optometrist or ophthalmologist (PRIOR to determining eligibility for VA-provided eyeglasses) to establish medical justification for provision of eyeglasses.
- Veterans with vision loss that interferes with or restricts communication, quality of life or activities of daily living to the extent that it affects their active participation in the provision of health care services (for example inability to read medication labels) as determined by an eye care provider.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information regarding VA healthcare services in Southeastern New Mexico.