

# Veterans' health matters

## VA Weight Control Campaign Underway

**W**ith Super Bowl XLI now in the history books, the National Football League has concluded another season, but that's not keeping Hall of Fame quarterback and former Super Bowl MVP John Elway off the field.

Elway, who starred as quarterback of the Denver Broncos for 16 years and was named Most Valuable Player of the 1987 NFL season and of Super Bowl XXXIII, is now featured in a series of public service announcements (PSAs) promoting the HealthierUS Veterans (HUSV) program. The HUSV is a comprehensive weight management program sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to combat the high rates of illness among VA's patients caused by obesity.

Shown on the gridiron of Denver's Invesco Field at Mile High, and wearing his familiar number 7 Bronco jersey, Elway reminds veterans that taking "just a few steps can make a big difference," and encourages them to become more active and improve their nutrition habits. The Elway PSAs can be viewed at [www.healthierUSveterans.va.gov](http://www.healthierUSveterans.va.gov).

Dr. Linda Kinsinger, Director of the National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, which oversees the HealthierUS Veterans program, said that HUSV is a nationwide initiative sponsored by

the Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services with the theme: "Eat Healthy! Be Active! Get Fit for Life!" The bottom-line goal is to reduce the risk of obesity and diabetes for veterans.

"This is a lifestyle and a lifelong program that is designed to help people make changes they can live with," Dr. Kinsinger said. "We are not promoting crash diets."

### **Five-Part Program**

Dr. Kinsinger said HUSV is comprised of five initiatives:

- **MOVE!** is VA's Weight Management Program for Veterans, and is being promoted to all overweight veterans, including those who don't receive healthcare at VA facilities;
- *Prescription for Health*, in which clinicians use body mass index as the basis for providing a prescription to the participant to increase his or her physical activity by walking or rolling (in wheelchairs) and to use a pedometer to track his or her progress;
- *Fitness Challenges*, which promote the President's Challenge, in which veterans and other groups are formed to challenge each other on weight loss or physical activity and to document their progress;

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# VA National News

## **"Aid and Attendance" Benefit for Veterans and Spouses**

The VA is informing wartime veterans and/or their surviving spouses about an under-used, special monthly pension benefit called Aid and Attendance, which may be available for those qualifying individuals who have in-home care or who live in nursing homes or assisted-living facilities.

Elderly veterans and surviving spouses whose incomes are above the congressionally mandated legal limit for a VA pension may be eligible for this benefit if they have large, non-reimbursed medical expenses, including nursing home expenses. To qualify, claimants must be incapable of self support and in need of regular personal assistance.

To qualify, the veteran must have served at least 90 days of active military service, one day of which was during a period of war, and be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. Wartime veterans who entered active duty on or after September 8, 1980 (October 16, 1981 for officers) must have completed at least 24 continuous months of military service or the period for which they were ordered to active duty.

More information and assistance in applying for this benefit may be obtained by phone at 1-800-827-1000, on the Internet at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov), or from any local veterans' service group. Submit online applications at [www.vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp](http://www.vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp).

## **Hospital Discharge Times**

In order to improve customer service, the VA Central Office has mandated a change in the Veterans Affairs hospitals'

discharge times. As of October 2006, the standard discharge time was changed to 11 a.m. Patients who are unable to meet that discharge time will be offered a "Discharge Appointment," or "Discharge Slot," which sets up the time they anticipate they will leave.

By having patients discharged early in the day, customer satisfaction will increase because the "wait time" for a hospital bed by patients in the ER/clinics/OR/scheduled admissions will be decreased and surgeries and procedures will not be delayed or cancelled.

Discharge appointments/slots will help VA staff plan and coordinate the veterans' care with services such as social work, physical therapy, occupational therapy and pharmacy. This will ensure the veterans' needs will be met in a timely manner prior to discharge.

Planning for discharge to home using discharge appointments will help the veteran and his family anticipate when transportation will be needed, and prepare the home for his or her return from the hospital.

## **VA Improves Services for Blind and Low-Vision Veterans**

Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Jim Nicholson, has announced that more than a million visually impaired veterans will receive enhanced health care services under a reorganization of VA's vision rehabilitation services. VA will make approximately \$40 million available during the next three years to establish a comprehensive nationwide rehabilitation system for veterans and active duty personnel with visual impairments. The system will enhance inpatient services and expand outpatient services throughout the 1,400 locations where VA provides health care.

Each of VA's 21 regional networks will implement a plan to provide eye care to veterans with visual impairments ranging from 20/70 to total blindness. Basic low-vision services will be available at all VA eye clinics, and every network will offer intermediate and advanced low-vision services, including a full spectrum of optical devices and electronic visual aids.

## **Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic**

Snowmass Village, Colorado will be the site of the 21st National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, which is jointly sponsored by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV). The annual six-day clinic, set for April 1-6, is a rehabilitation program open to all U.S. military veterans with spinal cord injuries or disease, visual impairments, certain neurological conditions, orthopedic amputations or other disabilities, who receive care at any VA health care facility.

Veterans will learn adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing and be introduced to a variety of other adaptive activities and sports, such as rock climbing, scuba diving, snowmobiling and sled hockey. The U.S. Secret Service will also teach a course on self-defense for people with disabilities.

The clinic will again offer a training and development program designed for top-level skiers. The program has been made possible through an agreement with the United States Olympic Committee and is used to identify potential Paralympic athletes.

The clinic is hosted each year by the Grand Junction (Colo.) VA Medical Center and VA's Rocky Mountain Network. ■

# Weight Control

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- *Collaboration with CDC's Steps to a Healthier US*, in which VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) are partnering with local and state groups on community-based programs such as "Walk and Roll" events that address physical inactivity and poor nutrition.
- *Fitness for Life Volunteer Corps* in which veterans are called to lead their families and other members of the community to join together in developing programs to increase physical activity and improve their health.

## Major Risks

Dr. Kinsinger said the program is targeting veterans everywhere because the high percentage of those who are overweight or obese are at major risk for diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart diseases, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea and respiratory problems, joint pain and some types of cancer.

She said good nutrition and regular physical activity can help individuals have more energy, sleep better, reduce body fat and weight gain, control blood sugar, lower blood pressure, decrease "bad" cholesterol (LDL) and increase "good" cholesterol (HDL).

## On the MOVE!

The MOVE! program has been especially successful in helping veterans at medical facilities make needed lifestyle changes. Dr. Ken Jones, Program Manager for MOVE!, said the number of veterans who have asked to receive MOVE! -related care to date is rapidly increasing, with many thousands of them participating.

There are MOVE! coordinators at each VA medical facility as well as at each network. Physicians,

nurses, and dietitians work in concert with physical activity specialists and psychologists to administer the program.

Ellen Bosley, National Director of Nutrition and Food Services, said the program was developed to provide practical ways for veterans to improve their nutrition, while also increasing their exercise.

"We wanted to promote a program in which dietitians work with other primary care staff to help our veterans understand the need for eating behavior modification and increased physical activity," Bosley said.

The basic MOVE! program begins with supported self-management, in which participants who are recommended for the program work with MOVE! team members to develop a plan to change their eating behavior, improve their nutrition and increase their exercise. MOVE! staff continue to keep in touch with veterans to help them track progress and set new goals, as they meet current ones.

The individually tailored program allows the patient to determine the level of involvement. Some veterans also participate in regular group sessions and may receive individual specialty consultations. For those veterans needing additional treatment, more intensive options, including medications and surgery, are also available.

For more information, log onto [www.move.va.gov](http://www.move.va.gov), where a questionnaire helps identify personal barriers to weight control. The questions link to about 100 informational materials on the site. People not enrolled in VA health care can take the information about themselves to their personal health care providers. ■

# Diet/Exercise Tips

**S**ome tips/advice for eating healthy include:

- aim for at least five servings of colorful vegetables or fruits each day;
- have three servings of low fat milk, cheese, yogurt, or other calcium rich foods;
- make half your grains whole grains;
- know the limits on fat, salt and sugar;
- control calories;
- drink water or other low calorie beverages.

**Ways to increase exercise through day-to-day activities include:**

- use the stairs instead of the elevator, if possible;
- take a walk (or roll) each day;
- park further away from your destination;
- stretch while watching television;
- move your body every chance you get. ■

# VA facility highlights

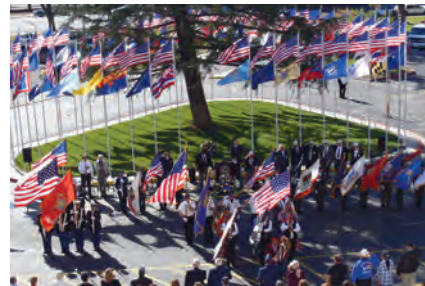
central california

## Avenue of 50 Flags Dedicated

On November 9, 2006, VA Central California Healthcare System dedicated the new 'Avenue of Flags' located in the center circle of the Medical Center main entrance. The ribbon-cutting ceremony, scheduled to help honor Veterans Day, featured six local color guards, including VA Women Veterans, VA American Indian Veterans, the Fresno State University Air Force ROTC, McLane High School Highlanders,

AMVETS Post #56 and the Fresno Marine Corps Training Center. Mr. Bud Elliott, NBC Co-Ancor of KSEE Sunrise, was the Master of Ceremonies, and the McLane High School Highlander Dancers and Pipers performed for 300 in attendance.

The Avenue of Flags displays all 50 state and U.S. flags on 50 telescoping flagpoles, with permanent lighting fixtures so the flags can be displayed at night. The wonderful and patriotic display was made possible



through a significant donation by the California AMVETS Service and Rehabilitation Foundation, and support from the companies of James Ashjian Lighting and Souza Construction, which absorbed significant expenses to help fund the project. ■

sierra nevada

## Emergency Department Upgrades

VASNHCS is bringing improved emergency care services to veterans in the greater Truckee Meadows region. The Emergency Department is now staffed by a team specially trained in emergency and internal medicine, which includes board certified emergency medicine physicians,

nurses with specific training in emergency medicine, and administrative staff to support the team approach to timely and effective emergency care.

Additionally, VASNHCS is breaking ground on a \$4 million, 7,700-square-foot emergency room! This newly constructed facility will be adjacent to the

current emergency department. It will feature all new state-of-the-art systems and an ambulance entrance to accommodate two ambulances. There will be 10 private exam rooms to increase patient privacy and general flow of the department. Construction is expected to get underway in late March and be completed in 10 months. ■

palo alto

## Surgeons Team with Robots

VA Palo Alto has some of the finest doctors in the world—and is now home to one of the world's most technologically advanced surgical robots. Recently, doctors performed the first surgery here using the Da Vinci Surgical System, a robotic system that is designed to enhance the operating abilities of a surgeon by increasing

dexterity, control, precision and enhanced visualization.

The Da Vinci Surgical System combines a surgeon's skills, robotic and computer technologies

and laparoscopic principles to allow complex, minimally invasive surgeries to be performed. The system consists of a surgeon's console, where the surgeon sits during the course of the surgery, and the operating station, which has four robotic arms.

A radical prostatectomy and laparoscopic weight loss surgery are just two examples of the types of surgeries that can be performed with the system.

This exciting new technology will allow VAPAHCS to introduce new surgeries and improve upon surgeries that are currently being performed. ■



## Clinical and Translational Science Awards to Transform Clinical Research

VA Northern California Health Care System, in partnership with its academic affiliate, University of California Davis, will receive funding of \$25 million over five years from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to establish a Clinical and Translational Science

Center. This award will enable researchers to provide new medical treatments more efficiently and quickly to our veteran patients.

Although there have been explosive gains in the

understanding of the basic mechanisms of human disease, translation of this knowledge to the practical treatment and prevention of disease has not kept pace. NIH has responded by awarding funding to 12 academic health centers across the country, to enable them to forge the new discipline of Clinical and Translational Science. The two universities in California to receive this award are located in VISN 21: University of California Davis and University of California San Francisco. Other recipients of this auspicious award include Duke, Columbia, Mayo Clinic and Yale.

The newly funded center will provide innovative methods to speed the translation of research results into therapies, tools and patient care practices for our veterans. Currently, basic research and clinical trials at VANCHCS include diseases which affect our veteran population, such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, stroke and Alzheimer's Disease. This award will provide increased collaboration between VANCHCS and UC Davis, and will provide an opportunity to accelerate progress in these areas. ■

## Manila Clinic Staff Honor Veterans

On November 9, 2006, the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic organized a momentous three-hour tribute to our veterans for the sacrifices they made in keeping the motto for the United States of America: "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

The program activities included dance exercises led by our dancing divas

from the Professional Services and Medical Administrative Division. The activity demonstrated that working out is entertaining, and age does not draw up the boundary to physical fitness.

Because of the generosity of the members of the Focused Group and employees alike, all visitors and employees enjoyed a nourishing breakfast.

Our veterans expressed their gratitude simply by saying, "the Clinic is home to the U.S. Veterans in the Philippines." ■



## New Overnight Facility Opens

SFVAMC has recently opened its newly renovated Hoptel, providing overnight housing for veterans coming to the medical center for appointments or medical procedures. To qualify, veterans must: be coming from more than 50 miles away; have a reservation made by their health care provider; be fully able to care for themselves; and

have a scheduled appointment or procedure within one day of arrival.

The Hoptel is located next to the main hospital, in two buildings which were the former homes of staff members. Completely restored and renovated, they can accommodate up to 39 veterans in rooms containing one to three beds each. Each room is also equipped with locked storage space for personal belongings.

Flat screen television sets and vending machines are also available.

Veterans, most of whom arrive in VA-operated shuttle vans, are provided with one night's free lodging and dinner. If necessary, longer stays can be arranged. Breakfast and midday meals, at the veterans' expense, may be obtained in the hospital's dining facilities. ■

# Your Health: A Laughing Matter

**I**t's rather common knowledge these days that, in addition to its

entertainment value, laughter provides many health benefits, both psychological and physical. According to a wide range of studies, laughter can help you: lose weight; improve your fitness level; reduce stress; and relax and enjoy life.

Movie studios and television networks spend huge sums of money producing shows designed to make us laugh, but often our biggest laughs come from sources which were never intended to be funny at all. Consider the following entries taken from actual medical charts:

- Patient will need disposition, and we will have Dr. Blank dispose of him.
- Healthy-appearing, decrepit 69-year-old male, mentally alert but forgetful.
- While in ER, she was examined, X-rated, and sent home.
- I saw your patient today, who is still under our car for physical therapy.
- Large brown stool ambulating in the hall.
- The baby was delivered, the cord clamped and cut and handed to the pediatrician, who breathed and cried immediately.
- The patient left the hospital feeling much better, except for her original complaint.
- The patient was in his usual state of good health until his airplane ran out of gas and crashed.
- The patient expired on the floor uneventfully.
- When she fainted, her eyes rolled around the room.
- Bleeding started in the rectal area and continued all the way to Los Angeles.
- She slipped on the ice and apparently her legs went in opposite directions in early December. ■

## WORD SEARCH

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# In the News Again

**F**or the seventh straight year, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has received significantly higher marks than the private health care industry on a leading independent survey of customer satisfaction.

“Our patients are the best judges of our health care system, and for the seventh consecutive year, VA has received high marks from its customers in this independent study,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. “This

study reaffirms VA’s success in providing world-class health care to our nation’s veterans.”

The annual results from the American Customer

Satisfaction Index (ACSI) also showed that overall satisfaction of patients for both inpatient and outpatient services increased last year at VA medical facilities.

The new ACSI survey results showed that the VA scored 84 percent in customer satisfaction for inpatient services, up one point from the 2005 rating. The rating of 82 percent for outpatient care was two points higher than last year’s mark. VA significantly outscored the private sector in both categories, by 10 points for inpatient care, and eight points for outpatient care.

The report was produced by the National Quality Research Center at the University of Michigan Business School and the Federal Consulting Group.

## **Added Recognition**

“One of the most striking examples of American health care success” —that’s one medical journal’s recent assessment of the health care system

operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The most recent tribute to VA’s health care system came in an article in the medical journal *Neurology*.

According to the article, “The VA has achieved remarkable improvements in patient care and health outcomes, and is a cost-effective and efficient organization.” As an example, the article cited VA’s comprehensive coverage, and said it is especially suited to manage chronic disease.

***“This shows that VA’s health system is recognized internationally as the benchmark for health care services [and] demonstrates that our commitment to high quality care is benefiting the men and women who have earned the best possible care through service to our country.”***

and military hospitals, such as those run by the VA, provide the best care available anywhere for some of the most common life-threatening illnesses.

Dr. Michael J. Kussman, VA’s Acting Under Secretary for Health, said the article underscores the Department’s commitment to high quality patient care. “This shows that VA’s health system is recognized internationally as the benchmark for health care services,” Dr. Kussman said. “It further demonstrates that our commitment to high quality care is benefiting the men and women who have earned the best possible care through service to our country.”

In 2006, VA received the prestigious “Innovations in American Government” Award from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government for its advanced electronic health records and performance measurement system. ■

The *Neurology* article is the second recent study citing the quality of VA health care. In December, a comprehensive study by Harvard Medical School said federal

# PUBLIC NOTICE

**T**he Joint Commission will be conducting unannounced triennial accreditation surveys of all VHA facilities. In addition, a one-day unannounced survey could occur at any time.

The purpose of these surveys will be to evaluate each organization’s compliance with nationally established Joint Commission standards. The survey results will be used to determine whether, and the conditions under which, accreditation should be awarded the organization. Joint Commission standards deal with organization quality, safety-of-care issues, and the safety of the environment in which care is provided.

Anyone believing that he or she has pertinent and valid information about such matters may contact The Joint Commission as follows:

## **Office of Quality Monitoring**

### **Joint Commission**

**One Renaissance Boulevard  
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181**

**Phone:  
800-994-6610**

**Email:  
[complaint@jointcommission.org](mailto:complaint@jointcommission.org)**

VHA facilities will not take any disciplinary or retaliatory action because a patient reports safety or quality of care concerns to the Joint Commission.

*(This notice is posted in accordance with the Joint Commission’s accreditation participation requirements.)* ■

Kerri Childress, Editor  
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 Palo Alto, CA 94304-1290  
 www.visn21.med.va.gov

# Where to find us!

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 San Francisco, CA 94121-1598  
 (415) 221-4810

## DOWNTOWN S.F. VA OPC

401 3rd Street  
 San Francisco, Calif., 94107  
 (415) 551-7300

## VA EUREKA OPC

714 F Street  
 Eureka, CA 95501  
 (707) 442-5335

## VA SAN BRUNO OPC

1001 Sneath Lane  
 San Bruno, Calif., 94066  
 (650) 553-8000

## VA SANTA ROSA OPC

3315 Chanate Road  
 Santa Rosa, CA 95404  
 (707) 570-3855

## VA UKIAH OPC

630 Kings Court  
 Ukiah, CA 95482  
 (707) 468-7700

## VA NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

### VA MARTINEZ OPC

150 Muir Road  
 Martinez, CA 94553  
 (925) 372-2000

### VA MEDICAL CENTER SACRAMENTO

10535 Hospital Way  
 Sacramento, CA 95655  
 (916) 843-7000

### VA REDDING OPC

351 Hartnell Avenue  
 Redding, CA 96002  
 (530) 226-7555

### VA CHICO OPC

280 Cohasset Road  
 Chico, CA 95926  
 (530) 879-5000

### VA MCCLELLAN OPC

5342 Dudley Boulevard  
 McClellan Park, CA 95652-1074  
 (916) 561-7400

## VA MARE ISLAND OPC

201 Walnut Avenue  
 Mare Island, CA 94592  
 (707) 562-8200

## VA OAKLAND MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUCE PROGRAM

Oakland Army Base  
 2505 West 14th Street  
 Oakland, CA 94607  
 (510) 587-3400

## VA OAKLAND OPC

2221 Martin Luther King Jr. Way  
 Oakland, CA 94612  
 (510) 267-7800

## VA FAIRFIELD OPC

103 Bodin Circle, Bldg. 778  
 Travis AFB, CA 94535  
 (707) 437-1800

## VA PALO ALTO HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

3801 Miranda Avenue  
 Palo Alto, CA 94304-1290  
 (650) 493-5000

## VA MENLO PARK DIVISION

795 Willow Road  
 Menlo Park, CA 94025  
 (650) 493-5000

## VA LIVERMORE DIVISION

4951 Arroyo Road  
 Livermore, CA 94550  
 (925) 373-4700

## VA CAPITOLA OPC

1350 N. 41st Street, Suite 102  
 Capitola, CA 95010  
 (831) 464-5519

## VA STOCKTON OPC

500 W. Hospital Road  
 Stockton, CA 95231  
 (209) 946-3400

## VA MODESTO OPC

1524 McHenry Blvd., Suite 315  
 Modesto, CA 95350  
 (209) 557-6200

## VA MONTEREY OPC

3401 Engineer Lane  
 Seaside, CA 93955  
 (831) 883-3800

## VA SAN JOSE OPC

80 Great Oaks Boulevard  
 San Jose, CA 95119  
 (408) 363-3011

## VA SONORA OPC

19747 Greenley Road  
 Sonora, CA 95370  
 (209) 588-2600

## VA CENTRAL CALIFORNIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

2615 E. Clinton Avenue  
 Fresno, CA 93703-2286  
 (559) 225-6100

## VA SOUTH VALLEY OPC

1050 North Cherry Street  
 Tulare, CA 93274  
 (559) 684-8703

## VA CASTLE OPC

3605 Hospital Road, Suite D  
 Atwater, CA 95301-5140  
 (209) 381-0105

## VA SIERRA NEVADA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

1000 Locust Street  
 Reno, NV 89502-2597  
 (775) 786-7200

## VA SIERRA FOOTHILLS OPC

11985 Heritage Oak Place  
 Suite #1  
 Auburn, California 95603  
 (530) 889-0872

## VA CARSON VALLEY OPC

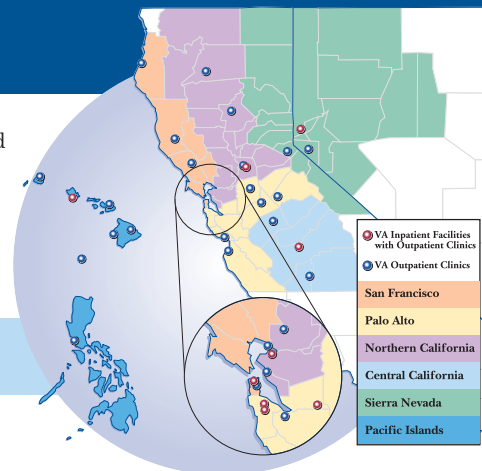
925 Ironwood Drive, Suite 2102  
 Minden, NV 89423  
 (888) 838-6256

## VA PACIFIC ISLANDS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

459 Patterson Road  
 Honolulu, HI 96819  
 (808) 433-1000

## VA PTSD RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

459 Patterson Road  
 Honolulu, HI 96819  
 (808) 433-0004



## VA MAUI OPC

203 Ho'ohana Street, Suite 303  
 Kahului, HI 96732  
 (808) 871-2454

## VA HILO OPC

1285 Waiuanuenue Ave., Suite 211  
 Hilo, HI 96720  
 (808) 935-3781

## VA KONA CBCC

75-377 Hualalai Road  
 Kailua-Kona, HI 96740  
 (808) 329-0774

## VA KAUAI OPC

3-3367 Kuhio Hwy, Suite 200  
 Lihue, HI 96766  
 (808) 246-0497

## VA GUAM CLINIC

US Naval Hospital  
 Wing E-200, Box 7608  
 Agana Heights, GU 96919  
 (671) 472-7250

## VA REGIONAL OFFICE & OUTPATIENT CENTER MANILA

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 Veterans Affairs  
 PSC 501  
 FPO, AP 96515-1100  
 (011) 632-523-6300