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News Release

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We invite any media interested in interviewing our VA staff to learn more about care and services to contact our Public Affairs Officer at 989-497-2500, extension 13020 or e-mail carrie.seward@va.gov

Aleda E. Lutz Veterans Affairs Medical Center Provides Updates on Access, Homeless Veteran Program, and Mental Health Programs

The Aleda E. Lutz Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) would like to extend our gratitude to the over 35,000 Veterans who allow us the privilege of providing care and services they so deservedly receive.

Employees at our VA Medical Center and the Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) in Alpena, Bad Axe, Cadillac, Cheboygan County, Clare, Gaylord, Grayling, Oscoda, and Traverse City, Michigan, strive to improve access, implement new programs, enhance processes, and enrich the Veteran experience. We want to take this opportunity to talk about several programs which include outpatient access to care, the Homeless Veteran Program, a new initiative whereby our VA is collaborating with Community Mental Health to provide more timely and convenient mental health care to Veterans who may not be able to get to a VA facility, and care in the community.

Access: Staff at the Aleda E. Lutz VA in Saginaw and the CBOCs work diligently to schedule appointments for Veterans within established timeframes and guidelines. The VA completed 96.9% of appointments across all clinical services within 30 days of the patient's preferred date of care, year to date. Appointments within 14 days of the Veteran's preferred date were completed 93% of the time, and appointments within seven days 88% of the time. Mental Health and Primary Care appointments scheduled within 30 days for new patients occurs on average 100% of the time. We have made great strides in decreasing the wait times for appointments over 30 days by 15% across all clinical services, all while increasing the number of appointments offered by 11,000. Outpatient Primary Care has offered and completed 44,859 appointments year to date over 43,919 last year. The Saginaw VA has dedicated the months of June, July, and August to the following access-related goals: increasing same day access in Primary Care across all facilities; increasing same day access in Mental Health across all facilities; and increasing direct scheduling options for Veterans seeking an appointment with Audiology or Optometry clinics. As you can see, our VA and the outpatient clinics are continually raising the bar to increase capacity for Veterans.

Homeless Veteran Program: This summer the Saginaw VAMC has planned seven homeless Veteran Stand Down events in seven communities in an attempt to reach out to homeless Veterans and those Veterans who may be at risk of becoming homeless. Four of these events have already taken place (Cadillac, Traverse City, Shiawassee County, and Flint); future events are planned for Atlanta, Michigan on September 7th and Bad Axe, Michigan on September 9th. All Veterans and families are welcome to attend as there is an array of homeless service providers and Veteran oriented groups on hand to discuss the various services they provide to all Veterans.

The Saginaw VA Housing and Urban Development VA Supported Housing Program has also reached a milestone by achieving a 93% utilization rate of the 201 housing choice vouchers. The partnership between HUD and the Saginaw VA HUD-VASH program has allowed our VA to house 188 formerly homeless Veterans

and in some cases their family members within our 35 county catchment area. The primary goal of the HUD-VASH is to move Veterans and their families out of homelessness. A key component to the program is VA's case management services. These services are designed to facilitate the attainment of the Veterans recovery goals by supporting stability in safe, decent, affordable, and permanent housing of the Veterans choice. While VA provides case management services, HUD provides permanent housing stability to Veteran participants and their immediate families by allocating rental subsidies from its Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program.

Although the VA provides homeless Veterans and formerly homeless Veterans with case management services; we would not be nearly as successful as we are without the support of our community partners. The Saginaw VA collaborates with numerous homeless assistance provider agencies in the community where we have built bridges to collectively provide services to our Veterans in need rapidly.

VA and Community Mental Health Collaborative: Our VA is working on a collaborative to allow Veterans access to mental health services by using Telehealth videoconferencing from Community Mental Health locations throughout Michigan.

We are engaging in a sharing agreement with Ausable Valley (West Branch), Centra Wellness (Benzie and Manistee), Shiawasee County, and Lapeer County. The VA will work closely with these community mental health agencies to identify Veterans seeking care and be able to connect them with VA mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and other VA staff. This new program will more immediately provide services to Veterans in need and eliminate the need for sometimes lengthy travel to the nearest VA facility.

Mental Health Summit – Traverse City, Michigan, June 24, 2016: The Mental Health Summit held in Traverse City, Michigan, on June 24, 2016, had over 30 community agencies represented. The goal of this summit was to facilitate communication between the VA and community agencies to support Veterans' needs. Outcomes of the summit were included in action planning with clear expectations and deadlines to enhance partnerships between the VA and those community agencies. Many participants shared the summit was beneficial in networking to help coordinate care and other needs within their communities. Additionally, there was a presentation on suicide prevention and the many initiatives to help Veterans at risk.

Care in Community – Veterans needing care VA cannot provide as defined by services offered, distance, or timeframe requirements, have a choice through the Veterans Choice Program (VCP). VA staff work closely with Veterans and a contracted Third Party Administrator to schedule that care in the community. However, more recent developments have given the VA the opportunity to establish VCP Provider Agreements. These agreements will help VA expand its provider networks to offer Veterans more health care options in their local communities.

The programs mentioned are only a small example of the great things VA staff are doing to promote health and healing at the VA facilities here in Michigan. We continue to evaluate processes, identify opportunities for improvement, and initiate change to better serve those who have served.

The Aleda E. Lutz VAMC in Saginaw, Michigan operates an 81-bed skilled nursing and rehabilitation Community Living Center, with an additional 8-bed acute medicine and telemetry wing. It provides care to over 34,700 Veterans in a 35-county geographic area, from mid-Michigan to the Mackinac Bridge. Veterans also receive care at one of our nine VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics located throughout Michigan. More information about this VA can be found at www.saginaw.va.gov.

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