

VA



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# News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE 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](mailto:carrie.seward@va.gov)

## Safe Mental Health Care During the COVID-19 Outbreak

*VA Encourages Veterans To Access VA Mental Health Support From Home*

Saginaw, Michigan - May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Now, more than ever, the Aleda E. Lutz VA and Community Based Outpatient Clinics are committed to providing high-quality mental health care while keeping Veterans safe from exposure to the coronavirus.

To help reduce the risk of infection at the facility, the VA asks Veterans to use VA's online resources for routine or non-urgent mental health care and questions. This will help protect Veterans from contracting COVID-19 while enabling providers at the VA facilities to focus on care for Veterans with the most acute needs.

"Due to COVID-19 precautionary measures, and out of concern for our local Veterans, we are honoring current physical distancing guidelines," said Dr. Barbara Bates, Medical Center Director. "Through VA's virtual care tools, we are able to leverage available technology to make sure that our patients and staff are as safe as possible during this time."

VA offers Veterans a variety of at-home resources, including the following:

**Telephone or Video Appointments** – Veterans should maintain their existing mental health appointments — and may receive care at home — using VA Video Connect on their computers, smartphones, or tablets. To set up telephone or video appointments, Veterans can send their health care provider a secure message on My HealthVet by visiting [myhealth.va.gov](http://myhealth.va.gov). Veterans can learn more about VA Video Connect at [mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect](http://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect).

**Prescription Refills and Safety** – Veterans should continue taking all medications as prescribed and talk to their mental health provider if they have any concerns. Veterans may request prescription refills and order shipments of medications to their homes using My HealthVet or the Rx Refill mobile app, which can be downloaded at [mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill](http://mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill). VA's [Safe Home Environment handout](#) provides information on safely storing medications in the home.

**Mental Health Information and Resources** – VA provides information on ways for Veterans and their families to maintain and enhance their mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 outbreak. Information about managing stress and anxiety, as well as mental health resources, are available at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/resources](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/resources).

**Text Message Reminders** – Veterans can use Annie’s Coronavirus Precautions protocol to send automated text messages with information about COVID-19. This application helps Veterans monitor their symptoms and can assist those who need to contact their VA facility for care. Veterans may enroll in the app at [mobile.va.gov/annie](http://mobile.va.gov/annie).

**Mental Health Month** – This May, VA is observing Mental Health Month by emphasizing that “Now Is the Time.” Even during the coronavirus outbreak, Veterans can still prioritize their mental health. Veterans and their families can visit [www.MakeTheConnection.net/MHM](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net/MHM) to learn more about mental health resources and hear stories of recovery from other Veterans.

“Access to mental health services may appear to be a bit different, however, we want Veterans to know their mental health providers are still available to provide needed care and counseling to meet their needs,” stated Dr. Nazzareno Liegghio, Chief, Mental Health Service. “The model for delivering most of our psychotherapy interventions has been changed from face-to-face visit to virtual visits, in order to reduce the possibility of exposure to COVID-19, while meeting the recommendation for social distancing. Some Veterans were regularly receiving their individual psychotherapy virtually, however, precautionary measures put in place because of the pandemic resulted in all therapies being provided virtually. The biggest impact was felt by those who participated in group therapy provided at our facility. In order to comply with the “stay at home” and social distancing requirements, all group therapy had to be cancelled until these restrictions are removed.”

Currently, the VA Medical Center, much like other agencies in Michigan, will be looking at ways to implement recovery measures to begin providing care within the facilities again. Although this may be a slow, phased-in approach, Veterans will be contacted and provided information as soon as it becomes available.

For more information on ways for Veterans to maintain and enhance their mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 outbreak, visit [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus).

The Aleda E. Lutz VAMC in Saginaw, Michigan operates an 81-bed skilled nursing and rehabilitation Community Living Center. It provides care to over 37,400 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](http://www.saginaw.va.gov).

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