

VA PITTSBURGH HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

# VETERANS CONNECT

{ ISSUE 6 | 2019 }



## VA Apps Meet Health Care Needs

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System



## Dear Veterans,

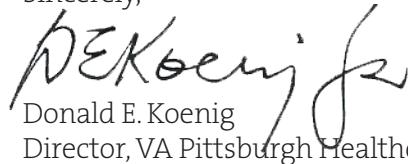
By way of introduction, I am one of you. A proud Veteran, I served 13 years as a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps. Born and raised in southwestern Pennsylvania, I am a native of Bethel Park, a municipality just seven miles southwest of Pittsburgh.

On May 26, it was my honor to return home to begin serving you, my fellow Veterans, as the director of VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. Serving Veterans is a duty I take to heart, as it is a sacred privilege and profound responsibility.

I am a lawyer turned health care executive, having served most recently as chief operating officer of the Mercy Health System and president of the St. Elizabeth Youngstown Hospital in Ohio. I do not expect this job to be simple or straightforward, but I do want you to have high expectations of me. I am here for the mission, which is to provide you with the highest quality health care.

Some of the topics we cover in this edition of Veterans Connect include travel benefits and transportation; secure virtual tools for managing your VA health care; the launch of VA's MISSION Act; requesting a correction to your VA health record; and VA's new Veteran Signals surveys, which allow you to tell us how we can improve services.

Sincerely,

  
Donald E. Koenig  
Director, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Front cover: My HealtheVet coordinator Bill Frazier shows Veteran George Coppola how to go online to access and download VA mobile apps for Veterans' health care.

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE: WAIT TIME UPDATE

The wait times listed below are the most recent available for our University Drive and H.J. Heinz III sites from VA's **Access and Quality in VA Healthcare tool** as of publication.\* The online resource at [www.accesstocare.va.gov](http://www.accesstocare.va.gov) is easy to use and breaks down data at each of our two main sites and five outpatient clinics.

### UNIVERSITY DRIVE

**6** DAYS      **2** DAYS  
Primary Care      Mental Health Care

### H.J. HEINZ III

**5** DAYS      **3** DAYS  
Primary Care      Mental Health Care

\* Data presented is for return appointments for established patients for the 30-day period ending July 8, 2019. Wait time data previously published here and elsewhere since June 2014 was drawn from [www.va.gov/health/access-audit.asp](http://www.va.gov/health/access-audit.asp), which updates every two weeks. The two sites present data through different, but meaningful, data definitions.

# Travel Benefits for Eligible Veterans

VA's Beneficiary Travel program reimburses eligible Veterans for travel to and from VA and non-VA authorized health care appointments. You may be eligible if you meet any of the following criteria:

1. Service-connected rating of 30% or more 
2. Traveling for treatment of any service-connected condition 
3. Receive a VA pension 
4. Income does not exceed the maximum annual VA pension rate 
5. Traveling for a scheduled compensation or pension exam 

You may qualify for special mode transportation in an ambulance or wheelchair van if you meet any of the eligibility criteria above, a VA clinician determines you need an ambulance or specially equipped van for your medical condition, and the travel is preauthorized. Preauthorization is not required in a health- or life-threatening emergency.

To request reimbursement, you will need VA Form 10-3542,

Veteran/Beneficiary Claim for Reimbursement of Travel Expenses. You can obtain the form from the Beneficiary Travel window at University Drive or the patient registration desk at the H.J. Heinz III campus. While you are there, you can select to receive payment via direct deposit to your bank account or a Direct Express Debit Mastercard. Return the form in person, via mail or secure fax within 30 days of the travel.

 Find more details on VA's Beneficiary Travel program at [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/beneficiary\\_travel.asp](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/beneficiary_travel.asp)



## TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

If you are not eligible for VA-reimbursed transportation to our facilities, other modes of transportation are available.

### SHUTTLES

**Heinz Shuttle** – Free service between our main campuses.

**Shuttle Plus** – Free service between University Drive buildings and the federal building in downtown Pittsburgh.

### DAV VANS

Free van transportation for eligible Veterans to and from our medical facilities.

### PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mass transit services include taxis and buses. For your convenience, please download our Transportation Resource Guide\*.

### \*ALL TRANSPORTATION DETAILS:

[www.pittsburgh.va.gov/  
Transportation.asp](http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov/Transportation.asp)

# Connect to Your Care

## **24/7 Nurse Call Center:**

412-822-2222, press 3

## **Audiology:** Hearing, tinnitus and

balance disorders.

412-360-6400

## **Behavioral Health:** Consultation, evaluation and treatment.

412-360-6600

## **Caregiver Services:** Help at home and someone to listen.

412-822-2364 or 1-855-260-3274

## **Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders:**

Residential: 412-360-6611

Outpatient: 412-360-6092

## **Chaplain Services:** 412-822-1551

## **Community Based Care:** Services to help chronically ill or disabled Veterans of any age remain in their homes. 412-822-2910

## **Connected Care:** Telehealth, VA Mobile and more. 412-360-3235

## **Copays:** Online at pay.gov, by phone at 1-888-827-4817, or in person at any VA medical center.

## **Dental:** 412-822-2130

## **Emergency Department:** 24-hour emergency health care, including mental health services.

412-360-6322

## **Eye Clinic:** 412-360-6700

## **Environmental Registries:**

412-822-1707

## **Homeless Veterans:** Transitional and permanent housing, case management, dental and medical care. 412-822-1272

## **Help for Homeless Veterans**

**hotline:** 877-4AID-VET (424-3838)

## **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and**

## **Transgender Veterans:** Culturally and clinically competent care for LGBT Veterans. 412-360-1210

## **Military Sexual Trauma:** Help for any Veteran who experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment during military service. 412-360-1040

## **My HealtheVet:** Online access to health records, electronic messaging and prescription refills. www.myhealth.va.gov 412-360-6838

## **Pathology and Laboratory:**

412-360-1572

## **Patient Advocate:** 412-360-3614 or 412-822-1562

## **Pharmacy:** Refill prescriptions by phone, mail or the internet. 412-822-3140

## **Physical Medicine and**

## **Rehabilitation:** Inpatient and outpatient physical, occupational, and kinesiotherapy, low vision and blind rehab services. 412-822-2111

## **Podiatry:** 412-822-3000, press 5

## **Primary Care:** Annual checkups, nutrition counseling and more. 412-822-3000

## **Prosthetics:** 412-822-3728

## **Radiology:** X-ray, ultrasound, CT, and MRI. 412-360-6216

## **Release of Information:** 412-822-1135 or ROIPGH@va.gov

## **Research:** Improving lives

through health care discovery and innovation. 412-360-2386

## **Speech Pathology:** Treatments for speech, language, voice, cognitive communication, swallowing impairments and training for stroke patients. 412-360-6400

## **Spinal Cord Injury:** 412-822-3000

## **Surgical Services:** Same-day surgery, neurosurgery and cardiothoracic, hand, ophthalmology, orthopedic, otolaryngology, plastic and vascular surgery. 412-360-6700

## **Transition and Care**

## **Management Program:** Health care tailored to post-911 Veterans. 412-822-2362

## **Travel Office:** 412-360-3620 or 412-360-6783

## **Vet Centers:** Counseling and referral for combat Veterans, their families, and any Veteran who was sexually traumatized while serving. Pittsburgh: 412-920-1765 Wheeling: 304-232-0587 White Oak: 412-678-7704

## **Veterans Crisis Line:** Confidential help for Veterans in crisis and their families and friends. www.veteranscrisisline.net 1-800-273-8255 (press 1) Text to 838255

## **Voluntary and Recreation Services:** 412-822-3098

## **Women's Health Services:** 412-360-6289

*Not all Veterans are eligible for every service listed.*

For a more comprehensive list of services, visit [www.pittsburgh.va.gov/services](http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov/services)



# Plan Care in Advance

## Forms Ensure Wishes are Met

Do you have a plan for your health care if you are too ill to make your own decisions? If you cannot make health care decisions, who will speak for you?

Advance care planning is difficult to think about, but it's important to ensure your wishes are met. Three documents can help:

- 1. Advance directive** – a legal document that protects your right to make your own medical decisions.
- 2. Durable power of attorney for health care** – lets you name a health care agent to make health care decisions for you if you are unable.
- 3. Living will** – lets you decide on treatments you want or do not want, including CPR, a feeding tube, breathing machine, etc.

VA recognizes all types of advance directives, including

VA, Department of Defense and state forms. VA's form – VA Form 10-0137, VA Advance Directive – includes sections for a durable power of attorney for health care and a living will.

Ask your social worker for a VA advance directive form or visit [www.va.gov/vaforms](http://www.va.gov/vaforms) to download one. A social worker can also help you complete the form or talk with your loved ones about your wishes.

To get started, think about the medical treatments you would or would not want, if you could not decide those for yourself. Think about who you would want to make decisions for you

and talk with that person about your wishes.

Once you have completed the VA advance directive and are ready to sign it, you will need two witnesses. A VA chaplain, social worker or any nonclinical employee can be a witness. Store the original in a safe place and give copies to your health care provider, health care agent and a family member.



To learn more, visit  
[www.ethics.va.gov/  
for\\_veterans.asp](http://www.ethics.va.gov/for_veterans.asp).

# { PROGRAM Spotlight }

# Online or On the Go

VA Virtual Tools Meet Health Care Needs

Online or on the go,  
you can now manage  
your VA health care with  
our ever-growing suite of virtual  
tools and mobile apps. From online  
appointment scheduling to mobile self-care  
apps, VA has an app to meet your specific needs.



## Online

### MY HEALHeVET

My HealtheVet allows you to view, print or share your VA medical records, order prescription medication refills, view appointments, and exchange secure messages with your care team using Secure Messaging.

To register, visit  
[myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/user-registration](http://myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/user-registration)

Have questions or need help?

Call VAPHS' My HealtheVet coordinators at 412-360-6838.

### ONLINE SCHEDULING

Online scheduling lets you view and cancel appointments, schedule primary care appointments, or request a primary/mental health care appointment. To schedule online, you must have had an appointment with us in the past two years and have a premium My HealtheVet account or DS Logon. Access online scheduling through MyHealtheVet or download the VA Online Scheduling app at [mobile.va.gov/appstore](http://mobile.va.gov/appstore)



## Text Alerts

### VETEXT

VEText sends you text-message reminders of upcoming VA appointments. You can cancel or confirm with a simple reply.

You are enrolled automatically if we have your current mobile number, but you can opt out at any time with a simple text-message reply.

Update your mobile number at any kiosk, during any appointment check-in or check-out, or at [myhealth.va.gov](http://myhealth.va.gov).



## Mobile Apps

### MOVE! COACH

Helps you monitor, track and receive feedback on your progress with weight, diet and exercise goals.

### PTSD COACH

Educes and provides anger management, relaxation and positive self-talk tools for managing the stresses of daily life with PTSD.

### STAY QUIT COACH

Helps you create a quit-smoking plan and provides interactive tools for coping with the urge to smoke.

### VETCHANGE

Tools for cutting down or quitting drinking, especially if you are concerned about how your drinking relates to post-traumatic stress after deployment.

### AIMS

Anger and Irritability Management Skills (AIMS) helps you create an anger-management plan and provides customizable tools to manage anger and irritability problems.

### ANNIE

Annie App for Veterans helps you manage self-care. It sends automated messages prompting you to track your own health and reply to the messages.

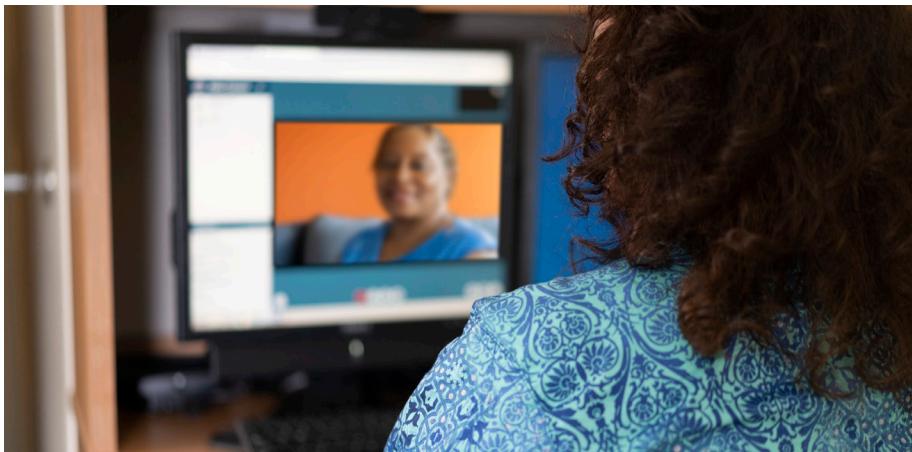
For more information, talk to your provider or visit the VA App Store at [mobile.va.gov/appstore](http://mobile.va.gov/appstore).



 Learn more at  
[mobile.va.gov/  
appstore](http://mobile.va.gov/appstore)

# FOCUS ON TECHNOLOGY }

## Virtual Visits to Home



If you need to see your VA provider but can't make it in for an office visit, VA Video Connect (VVC) will connect you with a provider from anywhere you want to receive services.

All you need is an email account and any device with an internet connection, webcam, internal or external microphone, and web browser. VVC works **without an app** on **Android and Windows** devices. For iOS devices, you must download the **free VA Video Connect App** from Apple's App Store.

When a session is scheduled, you will receive an email with a link to join a virtual medical room with your provider. When it is time for your appointment, simply click the link, enter your name and start the session.



Veterans enrolled in VA Pittsburgh can use VVC to talk with a nurse practitioner at the VISN 4 centralized Nurse Triage Call Center, located at Butler VA Health Care System.

VVC connects Veterans with providers via a secure FaceTime-like session for services such as speech therapy, primary care, behavioral health and our MOVE! weight loss and exercise program. Talk to your provider—we continually add services. Since introduced in 2018, **VVC encounters have increased 47%** and continue to grow.

**i** For more details, talk with your Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) or visit [mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect](http://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect).



### YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Have a compliment or concern about your VA health care? Tell us! We make it easy for you to reach us in person, over the phone, online or through the mail.

#### CALL Patient Advocates

412-360-3614  
412-822-1562

#### VISIT Patient Advocates

University Drive, Bldg. 1,  
1st floor, 1C-114 / 1C-115

H.J. Heinz III, Bldg. 51, 1st floor, 1A-134

#### GO ONLINE

Send a secure message through MyHealtheVet at [myhealth.va.gov](http://myhealth.va.gov)

#### WRITE

Fill out a comment card available in waiting rooms and inpatient units:

1. Hand it to any staff member.
2. Drop it in the box in the main lobby at either campus.

#### ANSWER SURVEYS

Return Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients via mail or VSignals surveys via email.

#### ATTEND Veterans Town Halls

View the schedule at [www.pittsburgh.va.gov](http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov)

{ EMPLOYEE Spotlight }

# All in One Breath

## Employee Innovation Benefits Veterans

By Hope Nelson



Registered respiratory therapist Kenneth A. Cochran, right, administers the very first same-day pulmonary function test performed at VA Pittsburgh's H.J. Heinz III campus to Veteran Akita F. Milbourne.

**V**A Pittsburgh nurse practitioner Georgia Brinit-Stiffler is always looking for ways to better serve Veterans. As a certified compensation and pension (C&P) examiner, that determination led her to develop same-day pulmonary function tests (PFTs) for Veterans seeking disability compensation.

C&P previously scheduled medical and PFT appointments separately — sometimes at different VA Pittsburgh sites of care — adding to an already stressful experience.

"That's potentially two trips to the VA and two times stressing about whether the evaluation is going to go smoothly," said Brinit-Stiffler.

Brinit-Stiffler figured if C&P had the equipment and personnel to schedule same-day PFTs at the H.J. Heinz III campus, it could save Veterans unnecessary time and travel to University Drive to complete their exams.

In December 2017, Brinit-Stiffler began to develop her "All in One Breath – On-Site Spirometry Testing for Disability Respiratory Examinations" idea in earnest. Soon after, VHA Innovator Network's Spark-Seed-Spread\* program funded equipment, training and supplies to pilot the idea.

During the trial period, examiners used a portable device to obtain data for disability

ratings, allowing for same-day turnaround and eliminating the need for an appointment with a specialist. The trial showed same-day PFTs not only save Veterans travel time, they also open more PFT appointment slots to other Veterans. PFT slots that would have been scheduled for C&P exams are now available for other Veterans.

VA Pittsburgh has since adopted Brinit-Stiffler's idea, making same-day PFTs the new norm for C&P exams.

*\*Spark-Seed-Spread cultivates employee ideas for efficiency or improvement into action locally and potentially to VA sites nationwide.*

# FOCUS ON CARE PREFERENCES }

## VA Launches MISSION Act

At VA, we put Veterans at the center of all we do. We work constantly to make sure you know about the health care benefits you earned through your service to our country.

On June 6, a new law that enhances VA care went into effect. The MISSION Act strengthens VA's ability to provide you with state-of-the-art care and services through a network of providers and cutting-edge technology.

With the MISSION Act, VA continues to be a trusted, caring partner in your health care. We are focused on providing an excellent care experience to you and the important people in your life. We'll expand our efforts to meet you where you are, with the right care at the right place and the right time — including through telehealth and in your community.

To help you learn more about your VA health care options through the MISSION Act, we created a booklet with information on:

- Enrollment and health care eligibility
- Expanded community care eligibility



### Choose

 For more information about the MISSION Act, visit [missionact.va.gov](http://missionact.va.gov).

TO YOUR  
GOOD  
HEALTH

## QUIT SMOKING FOR GOOD

All VA Pittsburgh campuses will be smoke-free\* starting Oct. 1! It's a fast and difficult change. We know quitting tobacco isn't easy, but it comes with lots of benefits:

**A healthier you, family and friends.** Quitting reduces stress, improves your lungs and immune system, and eliminates second- and third-hand smoke health risks.

**A safer environment.** Quitting minimizes fire hazards, especially if you use oxygen.

We're going smoke-free because your health and safety is our priority. We have many ways to help you quit tobacco:

**Tobacco Cessation Group**  
**Thursdays from 1 to 2 p.m.**  
No appointment necessary.  
Details: 412-360-1720

**Quit VET smoking-cessation toll-free quit line**  
**Weekdays 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET**  
1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838)

**Stay Quit Coach mobile app**  
[mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach](http://mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach)

Talk to your Patient Aligned Care Team about other resources and FDA-approved medications to manage nicotine withdrawal.

**Questions? Email**  
[vaphssmokefree@va.gov](mailto:vaphssmokefree@va.gov).

\*Per VHA Directive 1085, all VHA health care facilities will be smoke free for patients, visitors, contractors, volunteers and vendors.

# VetQ&A

## Answering Your Important Questions

VETERANS  
CONNECT  
ISSUE 6 | 2019

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kathleen  
Pomorski

MANAGING  
EDITOR

Kimberly Graham

EDITOR

Liz Zemba

DESIGN

Kimberly Graham

WRITERS

Hope Nelson  
Liz Zemba

PHOTOGRAPHY

Bill George  
Ryan Stubblebine

CONTRIBUTOR

Kristen Lyons

VA PITTSBURGH  
HEALTHCARE  
SYSTEM  
LEADERSHIP

Donald E. Koenig  
Director

Barbara Forsha,  
MSN, RN, ET  
Deputy Director

Lovetta Ford,  
LCSW  
Associate  
Director

Ali Sonel, MD  
Chief of Staff

Nicholas J. Haller,  
MSN, LNHA,  
FNP-BC  
Interim Associate  
Director for  
Patient Care  
Services

Alan Petrazzi  
MPT, MPM, FACHE  
Assistant Director

Sachin Yende, MD  
Interim Deputy  
Chief of Staff

**Q. I received a Veteran Outpatient Survey in my email. What is this?**

**A.** The Veteran Outpatient Survey is a key part of VA's new Veteran Signals (VSignals) customer service initiative. VSignals sends the survey to randomly selected Veterans about their recent encounter with VA health care services. Any Veteran with a documented email address in our system who received VA health care within the previous week is eligible to receive a survey. Surveys remain open for two weeks after the invitation is sent. The feedback you submit helps us to improve services.

**Q. I disagree with an entry in my VA health record. How do I request a change?**

**A.** To request a change to your VA health record, you must complete and submit a Record Amendment Request Form in writing to our Privacy Office. Be sure to describe the information to be amended and attach a copy of the disputed record, if possible. Mail or fax the completed form to the address/ number listed on the form. To obtain a form or for assistance completing it, visit our Release of Information Office (ROI) at our University Drive or Heinz campus; call ROI at 412-822-1135; or send an email to ROIPGH@va.gov. If you have a Premium My HealtheVet account, visit www.myhealth.va.gov to self-enter health information, but self-entered information is not added to your official VA health record. For more information on how to self-enter information in your My HealtheVet Account, contact our My HealtheVet coordinators at 412-360-6838.

**Q. How do I arrange for VA health care if I am traveling?**

**A.** To arrange seamless VA health care while traveling, notify your Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) as soon as you are aware. Provide your PACT with your travel destination and temporary address, a valid telephone number, your arrival and departure dates, and specific care concerns. Your PACT will then place a traveling Veteran consult to ensure your non-routine health care and medication needs are met while you are traveling. Contact the Primary Care Call Center at 412-822-3000 and press 5 to ask a medical support assistant to advise your PACT team of your travel plans.

**Veterans Connect delivers news and information  
of interest to area Veterans.**

Please send suggestions, comments and requests to [VAPHSEditor@va.gov](mailto:VAPHSEditor@va.gov).



**VA****U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**Veterans Health Administration  
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

University Drive | Pittsburgh, PA 15240

[www.pittsburgh.va.gov](http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov)

412-822-2222 | 866-482-7488

# VETERANS CONNECT

## ISSUE 6 | 2019



### GUN SAFETY TIPS

One in three Veteran gun owners store weapons unlocked and loaded in the home, according to a 2018 VA study. For ways to keep you and your family safe, download Gun Safety in the Home at [www.visn4.va.gov/VISN4/docs/gun-safety-tips.pdf](http://www.visn4.va.gov/VISN4/docs/gun-safety-tips.pdf) or our gun safety brochure at [www.pittsburgh.va.gov/docs/vcl-gun-safety-brochure\\_VAPHS.pdf](http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov/docs/vcl-gun-safety-brochure_VAPHS.pdf)

## Don't Miss a Thing!



### SAVE THE DATES

VA health care informational events

**Women Veterans Resource Fair | Aug. 16, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.**  
*University Drive campus, Learning eXchange*  
Learn about VA and non-VA services for Women Veterans.  
Learn more and RSVP: 412-360-3500

**Veterans Town Hall | Sept. 23, 10 a.m.**  
*University Drive campus, Learning eXchange*  
Visit [www.pittsburgh.va.gov/calendar.asp](http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov/calendar.asp) for details.

**Whole Health Fairs | 10 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.**  
Sept. 13: H.J. Heinz III campus, Learning eXchange  
Sept. 24: University Drive campus, Learning eXchange



VAPHS



VAPittsburgh



### Talk to a Nurse Anytime

#### NURSE TRIAGE CALL CENTER

**412-822-2222****1-866-482-7488 (toll free)**

Call our Nurse Triage Call Center anytime and **press 3** to talk with a registered nurse for advice on medical or mental health concerns.

Calls connect to a centralized nurse triage call center in Butler on weekdays. Calls placed after hours, on weekends and holidays connect with a nurse call center in New York.



### Ready with a Smile

Red Coat Ambassadors greet you at our door and direct you to your destination. Want to join their ranks? **Call 412-360-3547 to volunteer.**