

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

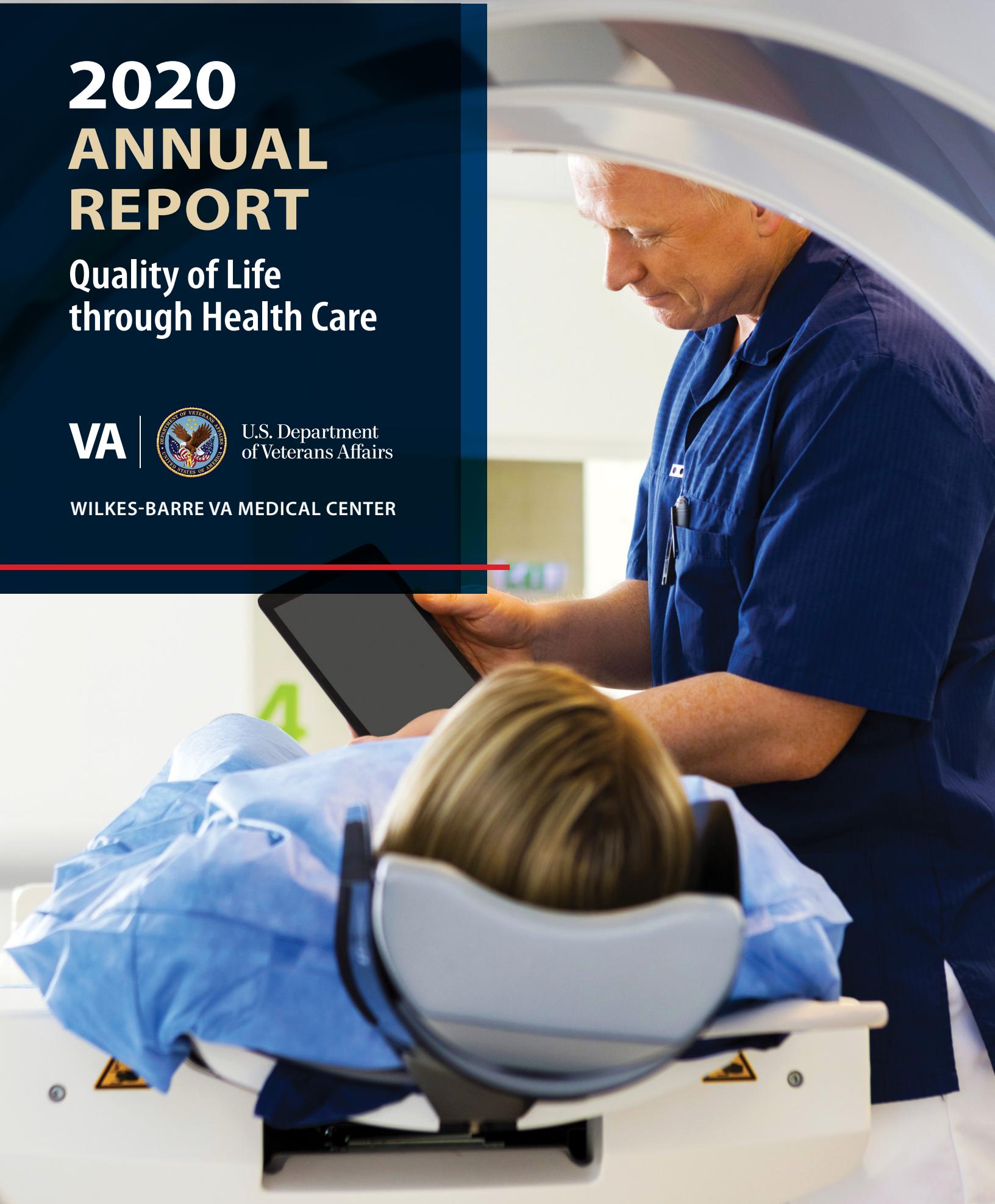
Quality of Life through Health Care

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER

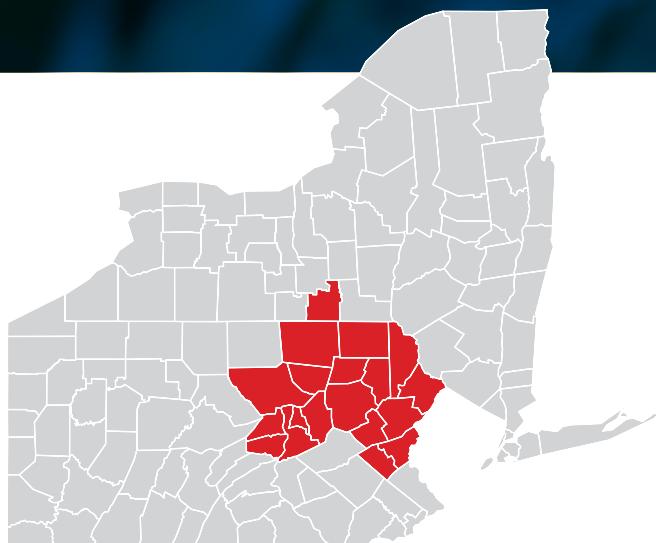


FACILITY OVERVIEW

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, is a complexity level 2 teaching hospital which provides a full range of patient care services. The medical center operates 58 hospital beds, 10 domiciliary beds, and 105 Community Living Center (CLC) beds.

Comprehensive healthcare is provided through Primary Care, Medical and Surgical Specialty Care, and Mental Health Programming. Geriatrics and Extended Care services are also offered, including long term care, respite, rehabilitation, dementia care, hospice and palliative care, transitional care and a variety of home care services.

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center is part of the VA Healthcare - VISN 4 Network along with eight other medical centers in Altoona, Butler, Coatesville, Erie, Lebanon, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Wilmington.

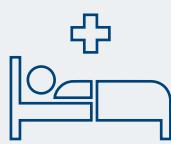


2020 Operating Budget

Total Operating Budget	\$349,329,000
Medical Services	\$313,329,000
Facilities	\$20,509,000
Administrative	\$15,776,000
NRM Projects	\$2,901,000

Service Area

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center primarily serves Veterans from 18 counties in Pennsylvania: Bradford, Susquehanna, Lycoming, Sullivan, Wyoming, Lackawanna, Wayne, Pike, Union, Montour, Columbia, Luzerne, Monroe, Carbon, Northumberland, Snyder, Northampton and Lehigh; and one county in New York: Tioga.



58 Hospital Beds

10 Domiciliary Beds

105 CLC Beds



Unique Veterans/Visits

Facility	Unique Veterans	Visits
Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center	30,833	271,682
Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic	8,678	57,338
Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic	1,129	3,118
Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic	1,371	3,927
Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic	2,345	12,669
Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic	601	1,680
Wayne County Community Based Outpatient Clinic	1,046	3,091
Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic	3,569	16,532

**As Veterans are often seen at more than one facility, site specific unique data contains redundancies. As a result, the sum of the site-specific data exceeds the actual number of Total Unique Veterans.



370,037
Total Visits

Total Unique
Veterans **34,101**

1,422 Employees

295

Veterans

110

Physicians

407

Nurses



173

Operating Beds

10

Substance Abuse
Residential Rehabilitation

4

Surgical

30

Inpatient Care

105

Community
Living Center

24

Inpatient Mental Health

A Message from **THE DIRECTOR**



"With the onset of 2021, there also comes a sense of renewed hope. As the daily administrations of the COVID-19 vaccines continue to rise, we're reminded that we haven't yet won the battle, but we're gaining ground."

With the holidays behind us, so also is the year of 2020. A pandemic year unlike any other, it was a challenging year which left many of us longing for a sense of normal which didn't involve masks, social distancing or virtual visits. We're all growing weary and frustrated. We're all ready for it to be over, but I ask that you please stay the course.

Stay the course because the pandemic knows no dates. This is not a battle which ended with the new year, but a war which can only be won if we continue to stay the course.

Stay the course for those who have lost a loved one, for their normal has been forever changed.

Stay the course for those who have lost a business or a career as they struggle to regain their normal.

Stay the course for the parents that have endured countless hours of home schooling, and the children that have missed the dances, proms and sporting events that were such a normal part of our formative years.

Stay the course because we're making a difference. Stay the course because

each day we're getting closer to a safer normal.

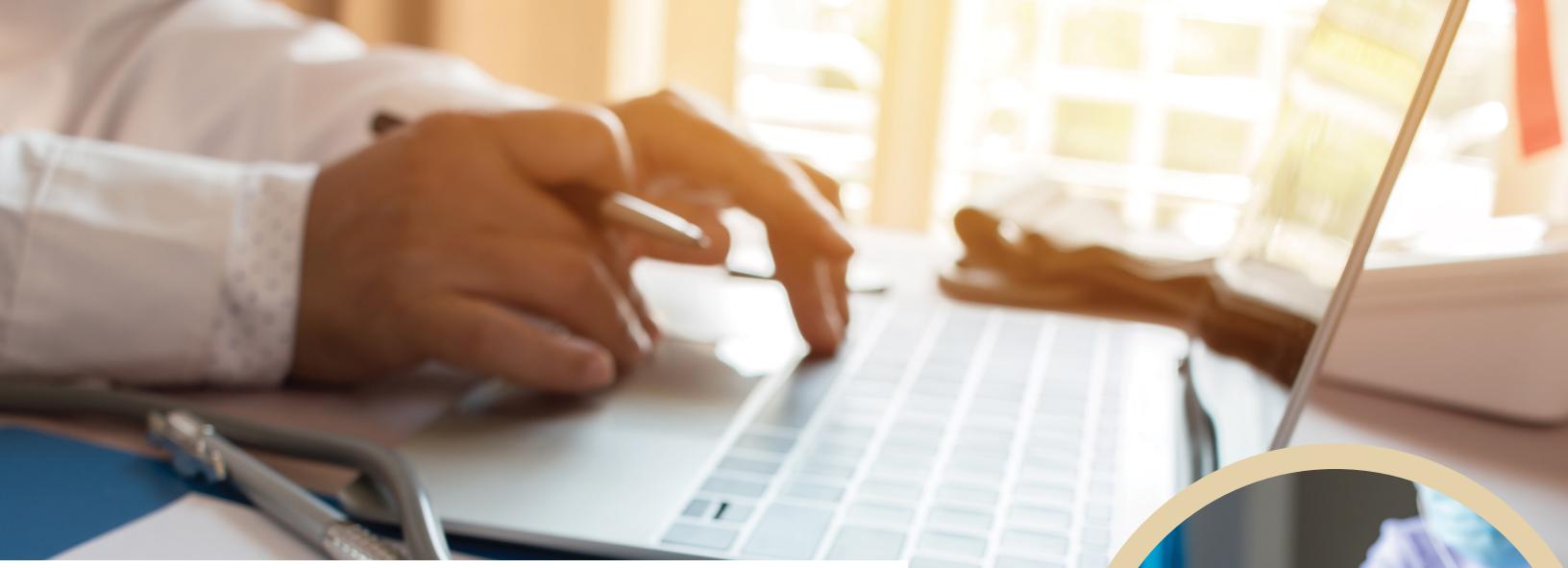
At the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, and across all our sites of care, we too shall continue to stay the course.

We'll stay the course to assure the continued provision of safe reliable health care for our Veterans in a manner that is safe for our staff.

With the onset of 2021, there also comes a sense of renewed hope. As the daily administrations of the COVID-19 vaccines continue to rise, we're reminded that we haven't yet won the battle, but we're gaining ground. Please remain vigilant, stay the course and continue to follow masking and physical distancing guidelines, so that someday soon we can all enjoy the freedoms we once knew.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Russell E. Lloyd".

Russell E. Lloyd, Director



Wilkes-Barre VA Committed to Bringing **HIGH QUALITY** **VA HEALTHCARE TO** **ELIGIBLE VETERANS**



VA ENROLLMENT FAIR **Thursday, October 24th** **5:00 - 8:00 PM**



Although VA health care is available for qualified Veterans throughout the Country and US territories, there are many of eligible Veterans which have never enrolled at the VA and may be missing out on low or no cost health care. The Wilkes-Barre VA has identified the areas within our catchment who have a larger percentage of unenrolled Veterans. Prior to the pandemic, in the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2020, the Wilkes-Barre VA set out to boost enrollment in

one of these areas, the Lehigh Valley, by scheduling an enrollment fair in Allentown, PA.

In addition to reaching the Veterans who have never applied for care, we wanted to make sure that Veterans who were once deemed ineligible for care, were aware that they may have become eligible if they experienced changes in income level, health or suffered a catastrophic event.

After advertising the enrollment event for over a month and a half, over 100 attending Veterans went through the eligibility process. We had an enrollment team on site to answer eligibility questions and if qualified, schedule their first intake appointment. The fair resulted in over 33 new Veterans enrolling for VA services.

Although the pandemic has postponed many new face-to-face enrollment events, it is not too late to apply for VA healthcare services. If you are a Veteran who has never applied or if you were once deemed ineligible and your circumstances have changed, Call **570-824-3521 Ext. 27877**. It only takes a few minutes to apply.





CLC staffer William Roberts spent many voluntary hours upgrading the new HO scale display

Road Trips, Donations and **HAPPY ENGINEERS**

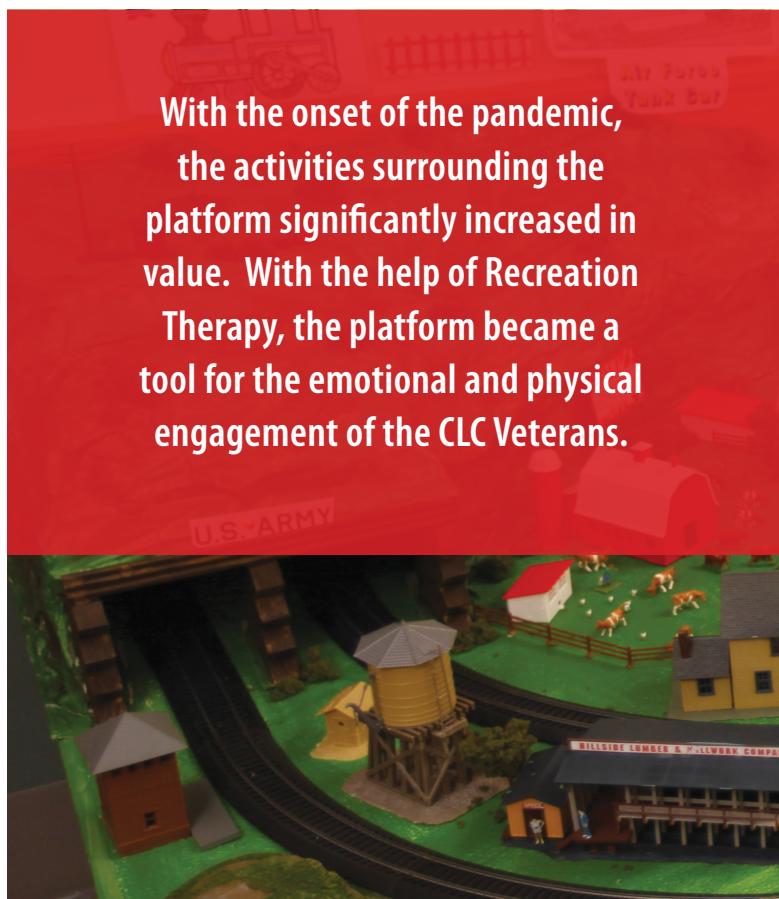
When taking care of an older population, it is easy to get caught up in the clinical care, while forgetting about the importance of fun and social interaction. The Wilkes-Barre CLC Staff recognized that a whole health approach needed to be taken with our Veterans, so they can thrive both mentally and physically.

In our younger years, we often take on a fascination for things our parents and other grown-ups have taken for granted. For some of us that fascination never goes away, and sometimes that fascination turns into a passion for more.

That passion was on full display earlier this year (Pre-COVID) when a handful of our Wilkes-Barre Community Living Center (CLC) Veterans took a road trip to, of all places, a local hardware store to operate their decorated model train display.



With the onset of the pandemic, the activities surrounding the platform significantly increased in value. With the help of Recreation Therapy, the platform became a tool for the emotional and physical engagement of the CLC Veterans.



The Veterans had so much fun on their road trip, that they requested to go back to the hardware store to play train engineer for a second time within a month. Even though it wasn't a real train excursion, it was a chance for them to get away, to look back and tell stories about the great times they had in their younger years.

The road trip to the train display took Veteran Perry Shull back to his childhood days when he couldn't wait for the Christmas holiday season to roll around to build the family train display.

Throughout the years, many groups and organizations have donated their time and sponsor events at our CLC. At one of these sponsored events, a volunteer named Mike Valentine struck a conversation with one of our CLC Veterans and found out they both were model train enthusiasts. They talked about the hardware store road trips, how enjoyable they were for him and how he couldn't wait to go again.

Mike was so moved by the conversation that he asked VA Recreational Therapy Staff if they had a model train display at the CLC. He was told that they had a few trains but did not have a platform. Within two days

of receiving approval, Mike built and donated a train platform so CLC Veterans could enjoy their very own display year-round.

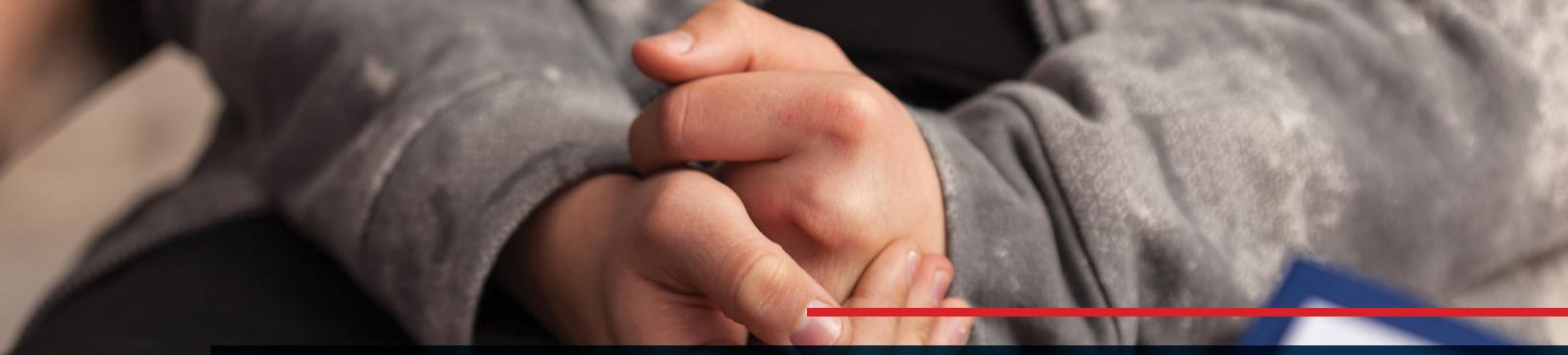
After platform construction, many CLC staff members wanted to make the train display top-notch and as realistic as possible. William Roberts, an employee within the CLC, donated many hours of his time to upgrade the display. He painted the platform, built buildings and constructed a huge mountain tunnel. Other employees assisted with the purchase of buildings and landscape items to help complete the layout.

With the onset of the pandemic, the activities surrounding the platform significantly increased in value. With the help of Recreation Therapy, the platform became a tool for the emotional and physical engagement of the CLC Veterans.



A special VA Medical Center Thank You goes out to Mr. Mike Valentine, Mr. William Roberts, and all the CLC Staff and Volunteers who donated their time, effort and funds to provide our Veterans with such an engaging display.





WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER'S SUBSTANCE TREATMENT AND RECOVERY PROGRAM

Expanded Services During COVID-19 Pandemic



Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center provides comprehensive treatment, including residential and outpatient treatment options, for Veterans that struggle with substance use disorders.

During the initial waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Substance Treatment and Recovery (STAR) outpatient services developed a plan to convert face-to-face appointments to a fully virtual model of care for the safety of our Veterans.

The staff were able to quickly shift all individual and group services into a completely virtual platform of care using VA Video Connect. The staff assisted Veterans that lacked digital equipment by obtaining VA loaned tablets to allow Veterans to connect with their VA providers from the safety of their home. The digital connection also allowed the Veterans to connect with

Veterans that lack digital equipment can get a VA loaned tablet which allows them to connect with their VA providers from the safety of their home.

online community recovery groups, which serves as a vital component of their support structure and individual recovery plans.

Due to the success of the virtual care conversion, the staff were able to sustain care delivery while increasing the ease of access for the Veteran. For the convenience and safety of the Veteran, the program offered 11 weekly group sessions, individual sessions, and individual case management services in a 100% virtual format.

Attendance and participation are especially important as relapse rates within Substance Use Disorder have nationally been noted to be on the rise throughout the pandemic, with individuals facing increased stress and loss of previous support systems. Wilkes-Barre's STAR Program has allowed for Veterans to remain connected with providers and support groups while navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and waiting for re-activation of face to face support.

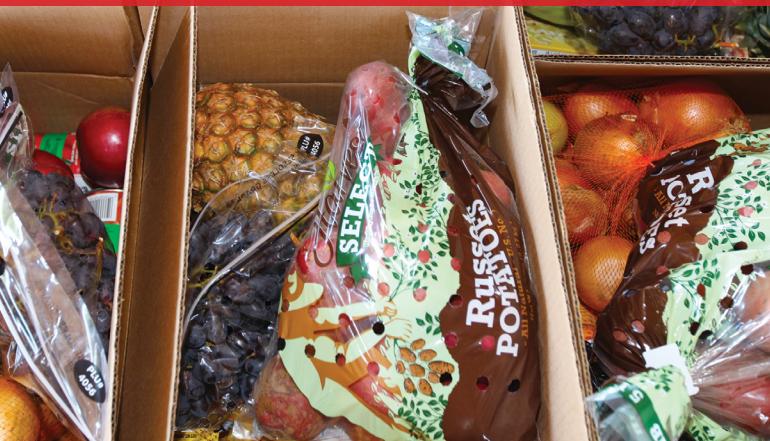


The overall shift to virtual programming has been favorably received by the Veterans and will remain a care delivery modality utilized by Wilkes-Barre long after the pandemic.



"Feeding themselves and their families was a huge relief for participating Veterans during this difficult time."

Emily Richters- VA Dietitian



Food Pantry distribution included dry food boxes, fresh produce along with protein items such as milk, frozen chicken, and frozen fish.

One of the many ancillary consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been food insecurity.

With stay at home orders, limited ability to travel, and unemployment on the rise, it became apparent that many Veterans would need assistance, specifically feeding themselves and their family. The Wilkes-Barre VA Nutrition and Food Service contacted Social Work Service to address identified need and re-initiated the Federal Employee Engagement in a Disaster (FEED) program which enabled them to start a Drive Through Food Pantry to help Veterans experiencing food insecurity.

Our FEED program partnered with the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Northeast Regional Food Bank, who promptly secured food deliveries for our food pantry.

HELPING VETERANS

in Need During the Pandemic

The Drive Through Food Pantry was set up with physical distancing in mind. When Veterans pulled up to the loading area, all they needed to do was pop the trunk or unlock their doors, and staff would place food pantry items in their vehicle without the need for them to leave the driver's seat.

Along with aiding Veterans at the drive through, the program was also able to deliver essential food to home bound Veterans thanks to the help of our volunteer drivers from the Disabled American Veterans, Social Work Service, and the VA Home Based Primary Care program.

In all, 50 employees provided the staffing manpower to provide this assistance pulling largely from Nutrition and Food Service, Rehabilitation and Prosthetics, Social Work Service, Voluntary Services, Home Based Primary Care and Grounds Crew Services.

Participation in the program required Veterans to be enrolled for VA services and to preregister with VA Social Work.

Through the successful implementation of the Drive Through Food Pantry, we were able to fulfill the unexpected food insecurity needs of many of our Veterans.

\$42,150

**Amount of
donated food**

1400

**Food pantry
boxes donated**



COVID-19'S IMPACT

on the Wilkes-Barre VA and Me

By Monica Magee, RN, Acute Care Infection Preventionist - Infection Control, Wilkes-Barre VAMC

Brittany Matosky gets COVID-19 test

In November 2019, I started my journey as the Acute Care Infection Preventionist at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. I quickly learned the people, services, locations, and what it meant to be a part of the VA team.

In November 2019, I started my journey as the Acute Care Infection Preventionist at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. I quickly learned the people, services, locations, and what it meant to be a part of the VA team. There was this wonderful sense of adventure. I loved the idea of serving those who served in the military.

At the medical center, the halls were always busy with Veterans interacting with employees for clinical care or just a conversation over a cup of coffee. Often, I'd see the same Veterans several times throughout the day and they'd be there to walk me out at the end of the day. It was apparent that the Veterans saw the medical center as their Community Center, so to speak.

As January rolled around, so did the talk of a virus spreading quickly in China, a virus that we'd come to know as COVID-19. Although the pandemic truly did not start in the states until March, the Department

of Veterans Affairs took a very proactive approach to protecting our Veterans and Staff.

The VA began converting many physical appointments to virtual care modalities to help slow the foot traffic into our facilities. Our mission became the sustainment of care in a safe and reliable manner. Throughout the pandemic, we have been able to assure that care has remained available to all our Veterans.

To assure the safety of our Veteran and Staff, all our sites of care implemented screening processes to limit the possibility of a contagious individual entering the facility. Veterans and Staff entering the facility were checked for fever and asked a series of medical questions as a precautionary screening measure.

Veterans were asked to arrive no more than 15 minutes prior to their appointments and patients were limited to one caregiver, over the age of 18. Visitation, across the medical center, was limited to compassionate care only.

Masks were mandated to be worn by all, and plexiglass barriers were put in place to protect both Staff and Veterans from a variety of respiratory viruses.

Our Community Living Center (CLC), which contains some of our most vulnerable patients, was very proactive in implementing precautionary measures for the protection of our residents. As hard as it was, visitation in the CLC was limited to the Hospice Unit and all social visits were transitioned to virtual platforms.

In addition to the clinical impacts related to virtual modalities and testing, COVID-19 had an impact on the overall feel of the medical center. The medical center and our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) became quiet, the halls were unusually empty since a majority of patients were being seen through virtual modalities.

Although the medical center was quiet, we remained prepared. I was impressed by the team effort which developed to assure the safety of our Veterans and Staff. Of course, our clinical staff remained a vital element in the delivery of care, but the response went well beyond our clinicians.

Environmental Management Services implemented specialized cleaning processes and additional tours of duty to assure availability. Facilities Management Service fabricated specialized treatment cubes, generated negative pressure environments and designed and constructed a specialized unit for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Staff Development assisted with the training of displaced staff so that they were ready and able to provide care in alternate environments. Infection Prevention made rounds throughout the medical center and CBOCs to assure that staff remained informed and were able to ask questions. Police Service erected screening tents and assisted with access.

At a time when uncertainty seemed to dominate the news, it was nice to see the teamwork, clinical and administrative coming together to assure the sustained delivery of care for our Veterans.

Although face-to-face visits remained available when necessary, the pandemic served as a catalyst

for the utilization of virtual modalities. While some Veterans missed the social interaction of the face-to-face visit, many also quickly realized the ease and efficiency of a virtual visit. Virtual treatment options may have initially been utilized out of necessity, but they'll be sustained out of convenience.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on us all. Although I have been touched as a healthcare professional, I can't imagine the impact on those that have lost loved ones, businesses or their financial stability. As difficult as it may have been, I feel fortunate to have been able to provide some care and assistance to those in need over the past several months. I remain cautious but look forward to the promise that comes with the approval of the vaccines. I believe that there is hope that we may someday soon return to the lives we once lived.

Monica Magee, RN, Acute Care Infection Preventionist obtains COVID-19 test swab from Rebecca Miers



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VA EMPLOYEES

Volunteering to Help Others

One of the Department of Veterans Affairs missions during a crisis is to support national, state, and local emergency management, public health, safety and homeland security efforts.

Pictured above: Carly Hack, left, East Orange VA Volunteer, Right

With the rise in COVID-19 infections around the country, the VA Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS) program was activated. Through the VA's DEMPS program, VA employees across the nation could volunteer and become part of an effort to assist with medical support in some of the most infected areas around the country.

Yuri Pelepko-Filak, Nurse Manager at our Community Living Center, was one of two VA Volunteers from Wilkes-Barre to join the mission at Meadowview Nursing Home in Northfield, New Jersey. Meadowview is a state-run long-term facility which has a full wing of Veteran patients.

"When we showed up, we were immediately greeted with applause from the staff. They were so happy to finally get the relief they needed. One of their units had around 60 active COVID cases and virtually all the nursing care staff previously tested positive. We told them, whatever or wherever you need us, that's what will do."

Yuri Pelepko-Filak

Some days Yuri was helping with paperwork, other days he was providing direct patient care or dispensing medication. Their staff told them that this was the first time they were able to breathe and get caught up since the pandemic started.

The second Wilkes-Barre volunteer Jason Allen, CNA, helped patients in an Alzheimer's unit with everyday activities such as washing, brushing their teeth, feedings and getting dressed.

"I volunteered because I've had family members pass away from tragic things, one being COVID-19 and I just felt it was very important to give back."

Jason Allen, CNA



"It was beyond eye opening. To see first-hand the struggles of not only the patients, but families and all levels of staff, was way more impacting than just reading it somewhere."

Angela Henning RN, BSN

Deployed to Audie Murphy VAMC in San Antonio, Texas

Jason also felt that it was important for someone to be there for the residents when their family could not be. They couldn't understand why their families weren't there or what was happening to them.

For Angela Henning RN, BSN, dedication and loyalty to the Armed Forces is in her blood, so volunteering for deployment to San Antonio, Texas granted her a chance to be part of something bigger, a personal challenge and a means to contribute specialized skills and knowledge in a time of need.

"Any opportunity to help our Veterans, whether it be big or small, I would give it all I could."

Carley Hack, MSA Timekeeper

Deployed to East Orange VA Medical Center, East Orange, New Jersey

Carley Heck, MSA Timekeeper, at our Williamsport CBOC, feels that her VA DECON training taught her to always strive to "Protect the House". I worked with clinical staff and the Area Emergency Manager daily to make sure everyone is safe and to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Nicole Parsons, CNA, deployed to Blackwood, New Jersey to supply direct health care to all patients at the facility.



Meadowview Nursing Home deployment group with Yuri Pelecko-Filak and Jason Allen

"The patients felt like I was always there. Occasionally, I did doubles or 12-hour shifts, they depended on me and when I would finally leave for the day, they would ask if I was coming back tomorrow. It was a nice feeling."

Nicole Parsons, CNA

What Nicole felt seemed to be a re-occurring theme amongst all the other Wilkes-Barre VA workers who volunteered. They each expressed a sense of satisfaction and felt very rewarded leaving every day and they looked forward to going back the next.

It was long hours of very important care for the people who needed it most. All the deployed Volunteers stated that they would absolutely do it again and would honestly encourage others who have an opportunity to Volunteer, to do it. It's was a great experience.

MOVE! PROGRAM

Helping Veterans Succeed
During the Pandemic

MOVE! is a weight management program that teaches Veterans to manage several aspects of life that contribute to maintaining a healthy weight.



We often hear that because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020 will be a year we want to forget. Through the dedicated work of our Wilkes-Barre VA Dietitians there are some Veterans in the MOVE! program that say that 2020 was a year of determination, prosperity and success.

In March 2020, our dietitians had to transfer their in-person face-to-face MOVE! classes to a virtual telehealth format. Knowing that accountability and support provided at these MOVE! groups are critical to our Veterans' weight loss success; our Dietitians have stepped out of their comfort zone to continue to provide excellent nutrition care through virtual telehealth classes.

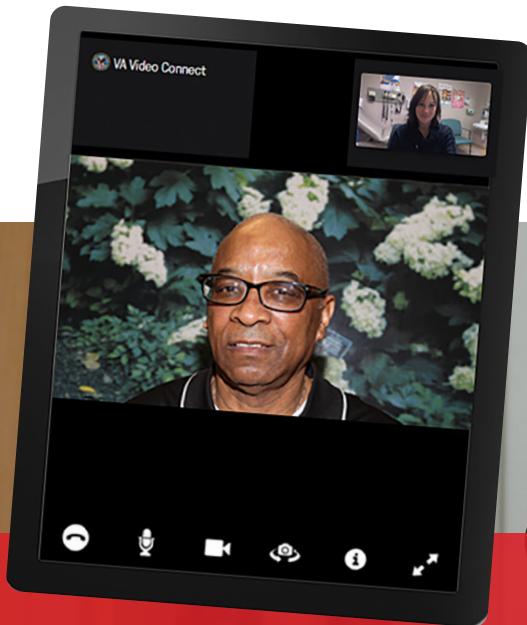
Some Veterans including Mr. G. and Mr. B. have made huge improvements in their health in 2020 because of these virtual classes.



Mr. G, a 69-year-old Veteran began the MOVE! program in March weighing 241 pounds and was considered pre-diabetic. Over the past 8 months he has lost 45 Pounds and has seen a reduction in his Blood Pressure and Cholesterol levels and has decreased his Hemoglobin A1C levels from 6.5% to 5.6%. He continues to be a huge inspiration to others in the program.

Mr. B, a 68-year-old Veteran who has multiple medical problems and is wheelchair dependent, also began the MOVE! program in March weighing 466 Pounds. Over the past 8 months he has lost 51 pounds. His weight loss success has given him motivation towards his ultimate goal of being able to walk again.

Our Dietitians continue to provide new and non-conventional education programs for our Veterans. Creating and implementing the VA Video Connect MOVE! group is just one example of what our Dietitians have been doing. We know the positive outcomes that the MOVE! Weight Management program has on its participants. By going this extra mile, our Dietitians have positively changed the lives of our Veterans.



With the help of your MOVE! care team, you can reduce health risks, prevent or reverse certain diseases, improve your quality of life, and even live longer!

TO LEARN MORE

Visit online

www.move.va.gov/MOVE

Call toll-free

1-844-MyVA311

How to get started

1. Let your VA Primary Care team know that you are interested in MOVE!.
2. Complete the MOVE!11 Getting Started Questionnaire at your local VA or online.
3. Print and review your MOVE!11 Getting Started Questionnaire report with your team who will help you set some initial goals..
4. With your team's guidance, choose from the MOVE! Treatment Options available at your facility.



LOCATIONS

Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

1111 East End Blvd.
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
570-824-3521 / 877-928-2621

Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic

3110 Hamilton Blvd.
Allentown, PA 18103
610-599-0127

Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

701 Slate Belt Blvd.
Bangor, PA 18013-9341
610-599-0127

Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

225 Columbia Mall Drive
Bloomsburg, PA 17815
570-316-4116

Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1537 Elmira Street
Sayre, PA 18840
570-888-6803

Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic

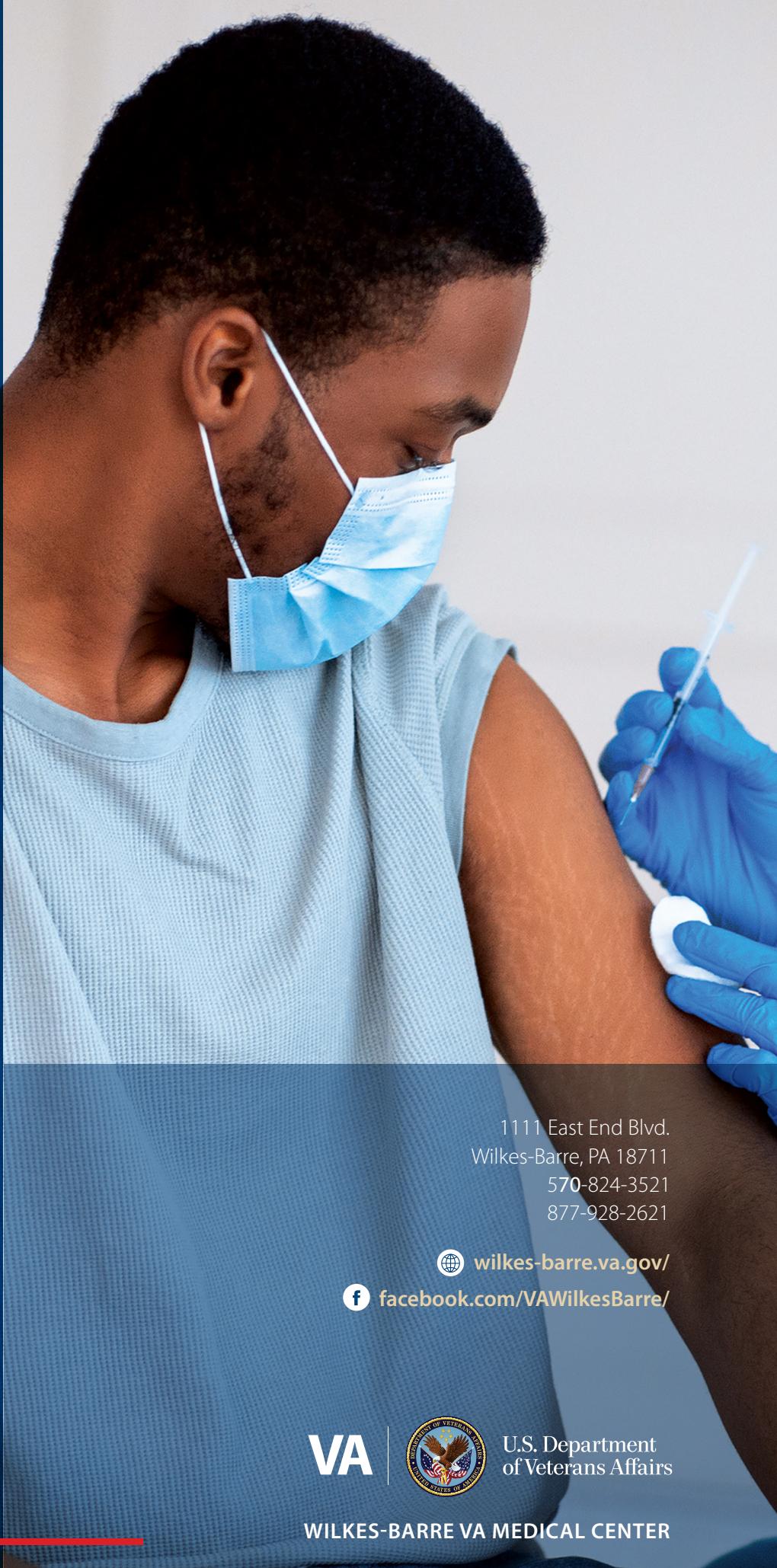
Tobyhanna Army Depot
Building 220
Tobyhanna, PA 18466
570-615-8341

Wayne County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

600 Maple Avenue
Honesdale, PA 18431
570-251-6543

Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1705 Warren Avenue
3rd Floor Suite 304
Williamsport, PA 17701
570-322-4791



1111 East End Blvd.
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
570-824-3521
877-928-2621

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