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OPERATION ADVOCACY

Welcome to the November 2025 issue of the Wounded Warrior Project ® (WWP) Operation Advocacy newsletter. WWP's advocacy efforts connect you and your fellow warriors with your elected officials, providing you a voice in our nation's capital and empowering you to discuss the issues that matter most to the post-9/11 veteran community.



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Dedication, resilience, and purpose — qualities that unite warriors and those who serve them. WWP's Jose Ramos shares how staying the course, even when challenges arise, strengthens our mission to support every veteran.

ot long ago, I set out for what was supposed to be a long, steady training run; three hours of trails, fresh air, and guaranteed pain.

Somewhere around mile 12, I was stung behind my ear by something – not sure what it was. Not a huge deal, I thought. I kept running and assessing the situation as everything felt fine. However, within minutes, things started to go downhill, and I quickly realized this was no ordinary reaction.

My body started to react in ways it had never done so after a sting, and what was supposed to be a routine endurance workout turned into a serious medical emergency.

I had to stop, get help, and address the problem immediately. However, although my plan had changed and I had to adjust my approach to long trail runs, my goal of finishing the JFK 50 Mile remains the same. I wasn't going to stop running and training for my race.

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Stay informed on the most important news affecting our warriors everyday.



LETTER FROM OUR VP (CONT.)

At this moment, an unexpected sting reminded me how quickly life throws up roadblocks, both in and out of service.

In advocacy, especially for veterans, setbacks can be just as swift and disorienting.

Right now, in a similar way, we're witnessing one of those "stinging" moments that tests both resilience and readiness. The ongoing budget impasse and government shutdown have created uncertainty across the nation, placing strain on critical services and adding stress for many veterans and active-duty Service members.

We recognize and appreciate the Department's efforts to safeguard Service members' pay during this difficult period. However, we also understand that as the impasse continues, many military families may face growing financial hardship and uncertainty.

WWP's free direct programs and services continue without interruption to support military families and veterans during this time. WWP has also increased its support to charitable organizations that provide immediate assistance to those experiencing food insecurity and other challenges.

Our commitment remains clear: to ensure that every warrior and family member has access to the resources, care, and support they need – no matter the sting, no matter the circumstances.

In advocacy, the sting doesn't always come with a warning, either. You can prepare, plan, push legislation, build support, and suddenly, the political winds shift. A budget deal falls through, a program gets defunded, momentum stalls, but the goal doesn't disappear.

It demands we pause, reassess, and adapt.

Wounded Warrior Project understands this deeply. We have built an entire culture around pushing forward, especially when things get hard. Whether it's through our mental health programs, fighting for continued healthcare access, or ensuring injured veterans can transition successfully into civilian life, WWP operates with the knowledge that setbacks are not the end; they're part of the process.

Advocacy, like endurance training, requires stamina, flexibility, and a refusal to give up even when the route changes. You may need to adjust expectations or pivot tactics. But you don't abandon the mission.

And let's be honest...it is frustrating. When you're stung, literally or figuratively, the pain is real. The immediate impulse might be to stop completely, but those who persist, who find new paths and carry what they've learned with them, become more resilient and achieve amazing results.

They are also stronger and more effective.

That's what WWP is doing, not only with this shutdown moment, but on issues like the Major Richard Star Act, access to Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Programs, and ensuring women veterans have access to gender-specific care.

We are not backing down when the path gets more complicated, just like you haven't either. Together we are speaking out louder, advocating more fiercely, and reminding lawmakers that veterans and Service members can't be left waiting – not for a paycheck, not for treatment, not when they have already given so much to our country.

We need more of that and more of your help – fellow advocates who understand challenges aren't an excuse to quit, but the reason to keep showing up.

For me, that bee sting changed how I approach my runs.

However, I still run with just as much drive as before, if not more, because I know the feeling and results are still worth it.

For those fighting for veterans, especially during times like these, the same lesson holds: adjust the plan, carry what you need, and keep pushing forward.

Because we owe it to those who've served never to let a setback - no matter how much it stings - stop our advocacy or impact our mission.

Jon P. Pen

JOSE RAMOS

WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AND
COMMUNITY RELATIONS





Big changes are on the horizon for veterans' care — but progress depends on your voice. Explore key bills WWP is championing to strengthen mental health services, women's health, and employment programs for veterans.

Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support (SAVES) Act (S. 1245/ H.R. 2576)

Military sexual trauma (MST) — which includes sexual harassment or assault during service — can have impacts lasting long after service, including PTSD, depression, relationship challenges, and isolation. Congress has enacted new laws to strengthen MST support, improve coordination, and expand peer assistance for survivors, but more can be done to improve the disability claims process for MST survivors.

The SAVES Act, introduced by Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME-O1), has garnered bipartisan support in the Senate through the co-sponsorships of Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AL) and John Boozman (R-AR). The bill would expand the definition of MST to include online harassment and digital abuse and direct VA to study how technology can support survivors. It would also create a workgroup at VA to review MST-related disability claims, staff training, and evaluate current standards. In addition, the bill would extend MST-related counseling and services to members of the Reserve components.

Building Resources and Access for Veterans' Mental Health Engagement (BRAVE) Act of 2025 (S. 609)

Women veterans experience higher rates of military sexual trauma, intimate partner violence, and related mental health conditions like PTSD, anxiety, and depression. One-size-fits-all suicide prevention tools often overlook risks unique to women veterans like MST or intimate partner violence, leaving gaps in outreach and intervention. The suicide rate for women veterans has more than doubled since 2001, further underscoring the urgent need for women-centric mental health and suicide prevention strategies.

The BRAVE Act, sponsored by Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), would require a study on the effectiveness of current suicide prevention and mental health outreach programs for women veterans. It would also modify the REACH VET program — which uses predictive analytics to identify suicide risk — to include risk factors particularly relevant to women veterans. Lastly, it would require VA to review its reintegration and readjustment retreat services to ensure group retreats meet the demand for services tailored to women (e.g., women-only retreats).



LEGISLATIVE UPDATES (CONTINUED)

Servicewomen and Women Veterans Menopause Research Act (S. 1320/ H.R. 2717)

Access to modernized, culturally competent, and gender-sensitive care remains a top priority for women veterans. With the median age of women veterans now 51, VA must lead in advancing women's health, particularly for those in mid-life and beyond. This bill, introduced by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA) in the Senate, and Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA-06) in the House would require the Department of Defense (DoD) and VA to conduct research and produce a report on mid-life women's health and develop a strategic plan for access to care and services.

Improving Menopause Care for Veterans Act (H.R. 219)

A 2022 VA survey found that while 80% of women veterans experience moderate to severe menopause symptoms, just 27% felt their healthcare providers were knowledgeable about treatment options. In addition, fewer than one in five VA facilities have protocols or clinical champions dedicated to menopause care, revealing a critical gap in support for this growing population.

This bill, introduced by Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA-26), would require the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study and report on the medical services furnished by VA for veterans experiencing perimenopause, genitourinary syndrome of menopause, and menopause stages. Once provided with the report, VA would be required to produce a strategic plan to (1) implement recommendations GAO makes in its report, (2) improve the quality of menopause care, and (3) improve the access of veterans to menopause care.

Protecting Veterans Access to Telemedicine Services Act (H.R. 1107)

The COVID-19 public health emergency dramatically increased adoption of telehealth due to social distancing and lockdowns — and it has remained popular with veteran patients because of its convenience and accessibility. During the pandemic, the VA temporarily allowed its health care professionals to use telemedicine to prescribe controlled substances that are prescription drugs, regardless of whether VA had already conducted an in-person medical examination.

This bill, introduced by Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR-03), would make that VA policy permanent and encourage greater use of telemedicine. WWP testified in support of this bill during a legislative hearing of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health on March 11, 2025. It was passed by the House of Representatives on September 15, 2025, and is tentatively scheduled for for consideration by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs later this fall..

Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Program Integrity Act (H.R. 3579)

The VR&E program offers comprehensive support to veterans with service-connected disabilities, including job training, employment assistance, resume development, and professional skills coaching. Despite the program's popularity and impact, many veterans struggle to access timely and efficient support.

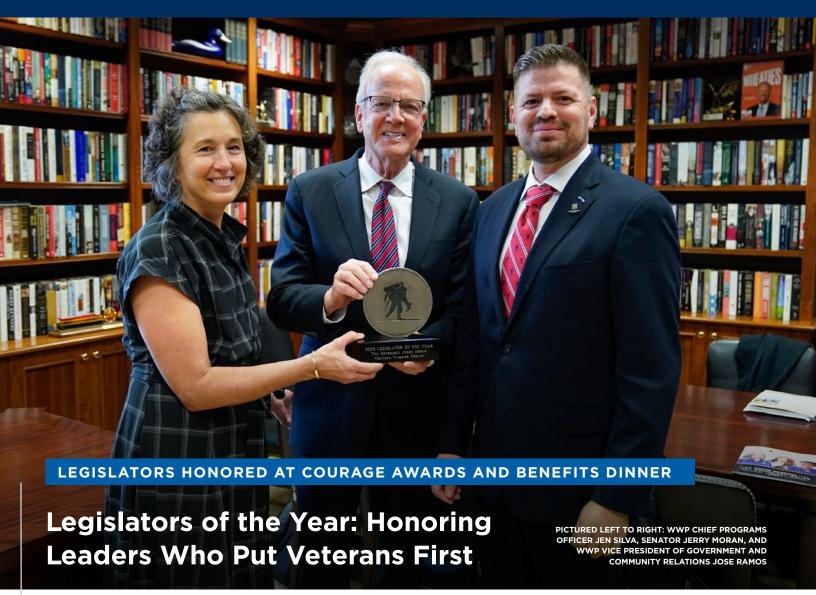
This bill, introduced by Rep. Juan Ciscomani (R-AZ-06) and cosponsored by Reps. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (D-FL-20), Gregory Murphy (R-NE-3), and Derrick Van Orden (R-WI-3), would make modest adjustments to the program to increase its effectiveness. Specifically, it would:

- ★ Streamline the collection of veterans' job and education histories to help improve the quality of initial program screenings.
- ★ Ensure VR&E counselors are assisting veterans who are actively searching for employment.
- ★ Implement new reporting requirements to adequately track veteran wages and employment outcomes to better assess program performance.

H.R. 3579 was passed by the House of Representatives on September 15, 2025.

Every voice counts. <u>Contact</u> your representatives and urge them to support critical legislation for veteran issues.





From passing landmark legislation on toxic exposure to expanding health care and caregiver support, these leaders are changing the way veterans are served. Discover why WWP named Senator Jerry Moran and Congresswoman Julia Brownley our 2025 Legislators of the Year and how their work is shaping the future.

very year, WWP honors policymakers who have significantly enhanced the lives of post-9/11 wounded, ill, and injured warriors through legislative efforts and achievements. WWP recognized Congresswoman Rep. Brownley (D-CA-26) and Sen. Moran (R-KS) as its Legislators of the Year during the 2025 Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner on September 10.

Outstanding Leader in the Senate

Senator Moran has championed veterans in Congress for more than 15 years, represented Kansas on the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs for the entirety of his congressional career, and now serves as the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.



LEGISLATORS HONORED AT COURAGE AWARDS AND BENEFITS DINNER



As Chairman, he has held numerous hearings and driven critical national conversations around substance use disorder, suicide prevention, access to care, and mental health for veterans across the country. He has actively helped numerous veterans' bills pass Congress, including the VA MISSION Act, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, and the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act.

"The work I do on the Senate Veterans' Affairs
Committee would not be possible without the team at
Wounded Warrior Project, who have dedicated their
time to serving our nation's veterans," said Sen. Moran.
"I am particularly grateful for the work they do to
support veterans in Kansas, and their advocacy for
important legislation like the Veterans' ACCESS Act, the
PACT Act, and the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century
Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act.
Thank you to the Wounded Warrior Project for this
honor, and I look forward to continuing to work together
to support our nation's heroes."

Among his many leadership milestones, Sen. Moran played a pivotal role in passing the 2022 Honoring Our PACT Act (p.l.117-168), the most comprehensive veterans' legislation in a generation. He has also championed expanded access to Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Centers, advanced support for veterans transitioning to civilian life, and improved rural access to quality VA health care.

Outstanding Leader in the House

Upon being elected to Congress, Rep. Julia Brownley asked to serve on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Now the Ranking Member of its Subcommittee on Health, she has been a steadfast advocate for Service members and veterans for over 13 years. She has focused on easing the transition from military service and expanding access to quality health care for veterans — especially women veterans.

"Throughout my career in Congress, I have made it my utmost priority to serve our nation's veterans as well as they have served us. That commitment has always been my North Star, because, at the heart of it all, this is our nation's promise to them, and we must fight every day to uphold it...I am deeply honored to receive WWP's 2025 Legislator of the Year Award. This recognition serves as a powerful reminder that we must never lose sight of the brave men and women who have worn our nation's uniform. Together, we will continue to fight for the care, the dignity, and the recognition our veterans have earned."

— REP. julia Brownley

Rep. Brownley has been a leading voice for women veterans and caregivers. She founded the Women Veterans Task Force in 2019 and authored the landmark Deborah Sampson Act (2021), the most comprehensive women veterans legislation in over a decade. She championed the MAMMO for Veterans Act (2022), expanding access to breast imaging and clinical trials, and introduced the Improving Menopause Care for Veterans Act (2025) to strengthen research and services. Her leadership also helped pass the Elizabeth Dole Home-and Community-Based Services Act (2023), which expanded caregiver support and home-based care for wounded warriors.





More than 75 women veterans gathered in Washington, D.C., for WWP's largest-ever Women Warriors Summit — uniting their voices to drive change, strengthen connections, and champion legislation that supports women veterans nationwide.

In September, WWP hosted 75 women warriors in Washington, D.C., for its annual Women Warriors Summit. Sponsored by Boeing, the summit showcased the strength of unity and the power of advocacy — bringing together women veterans from across the country to connect, strengthen relationships, learn new skills, and meet with elected officials in support of legislation that addresses the needs of the growing population of women veterans.

The summit kicked off with a lively opening dinner that blended connection with creativity, thanks to WWP's partner **Armed Services Arts Partnership** (**ASAP**). Women veteran comedians took the stage and brought the room down with laughter, creating a warm

environment and underscoring the power of storytelling and humor in healing, connecting, and even advocacy.

Training and Advocacy on Capitol Hill

Before meeting with more than 100 Congressional offices, WWP women warriors participated in extensive advocacy training led by WWP's grassroots and policy teams. Dr. Jeanine Turner, professor and director of the Communication, Culture and Technology (CCT) program in Georgetown's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, led a workshop on turning personal stories into clear, powerful messages for lawmakers — helping warriors connect to the bills they were championing and crafting compelling personal narratives to use during their meetings.





WWP women warriors advocated for key legislation, including:

- ★ H.R. 2717 / S. 1320: Servicewomen and Women Veterans Menopause Act - Requires the Departments of Defense and VA to develop strategic research and understanding of menopause and mid-life women's health.
- ★ H.R. 219: Improving Menopause Care for Veterans Act -Requires a Government Accountability Office study and report on menopause-related medical services provided by VA.
- ★ S. 609: Building Resources and Access for Veterans' Mental Health Engagement (BRAVE) Act of 2025 – Would improve VA's suicide prevention, lethal-means safety, and mental health resources to reach women veterans more efficiently.
- ★ H.R. 2576 / S. 1245: Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act - Expands how VA defines military sexual trauma (MST), allows for more types of evidence for MST-related claims, and extends counseling and treatment to all former Guard and Reserve members.

These meetings were more than policy conversations — warriors courageously shared their personal stories and provided lawmakers with real-life perspectives on how legislative actions impact women veterans at the local level.

As a result, members of Congress listened, and several congressional offices agreed to cosponsor or introduce key legislation to address the issues raised by warriors.

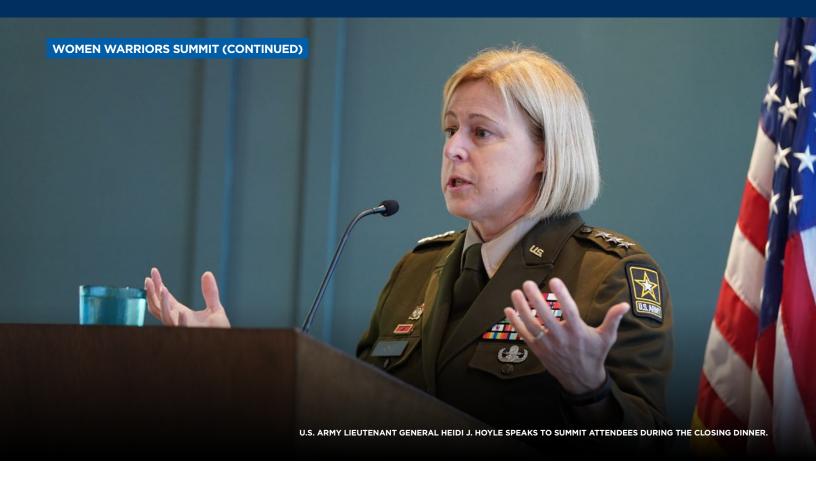
Launching the 2025 Women Warriors Report

A major highlight of this year's summit was the release of the **2025 Women Warriors Report**, which provides vital insights into the unique experiences and challenges faced by women veterans. During the report roll-out, Representatives Julia Brownley (D-CA-26) and Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA-6) offered remarks, reinforcing their commitment to championing women veterans' issues on Capitol Hill.

As part of the launch, summit participants attended a panel of women veterans working in advocacy who shared their experiences in service and beyond. The panel featured:

- ★ Donna Hoffmeier, SVP, Strategic Communications and Advocacy at TriWest Healthcare
- ★ Faye Fernandes, Counsel, Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs
- ★ Lindsay Brand, Director, Support Services, United States Senate Sergeant at Arms
- ★ Jen Burch, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs





Panelists explored how resilience and adaptability define women veterans' experiences, the role of mentorship in building confidence and belonging, the challenges of feeling invisible in veteran spaces, and the importance of women veterans' voices in shaping policy.

Women Warriors Reception: Celebrating Service

Following the report roll-out and panel, WWP held a special Women Warriors Reception to celebrate the contributions of women veterans. The evening brought together WWP warriors, women veterans who work within military and veterans service organizations on Capitol Hill as congressional staff or government officials. Rep. Jen Kiggans (R-VA-2), a Navy Veteran, delivered heartfelt remarks honoring the courage and dedication of women in service and advocacy.

A Powerful Closing

The summit concluded with dinner and U.S. Army Lieutenant General Heidi J. Hoyle speaking to the strength, resilience, and leadership of women warriors, encouraging attendees to continue using their voices to uplift one another. Her message resonated deeply, capping off the summit with inspiration and a renewed call to action.

"This was the largest Women Warriors Summit we've ever had, and we are so grateful for the more than 75 women warriors who participated this year. We would not have the same kind of impact on Capitol Hill without their courage, engagement, and dedication. Their stories, experiences, and perspectives are what truly move the needle in Congress, and we are committed to committed to improving and enhancing our Women Warriors Summits every year."

JEN SILVA
 WWP CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER



VA UPDATES (Contract of the contract of the co



EXPANDED BURIAL BENEFITS

As a result of the passage of the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (.p.l. 118-210), VA announced it has temporarily expanded burial benefits for certain veterans.

The new law specifies that eligible veterans are those who are discharged from VA-provided medical or nursing care to receive VA-provided hospice care at their home and who pass away between July 1, 2025, and Oct. 1, 2026.

Previously, veterans who died at home under VA hospice care after discharge from VA-provided medical or nursing care were not always eligible for a full VA burial allowance. The Dole Act addresses that gap.

If you're a veteran, family member, or caregiver, contact your local VA office for eligibility information and learn how to apply. You can also visit **VA's burial benefits webpage** for more information.



VA CAREGIVER BENEFITS EXTENDED

VA has published a final rule extending the transition period for legacy participants, legacy applicants, and their family caregivers (collectively referred to as the "legacy cohort") in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) through September 30, 2028.

VA classifies legacy as follows:

- ★ **Legacy Participants:** Veterans, Service members, and their caregivers already enrolled in PCAFC as of September 30, 2020.
- **Legacy Applicants:** Individuals who applied to PCAFC before October 1, 2020, but were accepted into the program on or after that date.

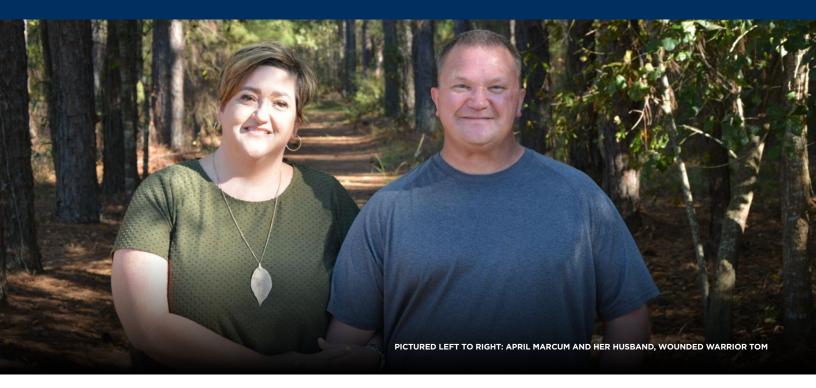
PCAFC provides extra medical support for family caregivers of veterans who were seriously injured during service and meet specific requirements. Benefits of this program include education and training, respite care, counseling, technical support, a monthly stipend, access to health care through the <u>Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA)</u>, and certain travel expenses.

Proposed changes to PCAFC that were published in December 2024 have received public feedback — including from WWP — and are still under review by the current presidential administration.

Learn more about this change and the PCAFC program.

If you have questions about this final rule, or to learn more about supports and services available to veterans and their caregivers, contact your local <u>Caregiver Support Program team</u> or reach out to the Caregiver Support Line, Monday - Friday, 8 am - 8 pm ET at 855.260.3274.







IMPROVED ACCESS TO COMMUNITY CARE

VA has extended community care authorizations to one year for 30 common types of care. This change allows veterans referred to community care by VA to receive 12 months of uninterrupted treatment before having to obtain a VA reauthorization.

Prior to the change, some VA community care specialty referrals were reevaluated every 90 to 120 days, increasing the possibility of interrupted or delayed care.

VA is now offering year-long community care authorizations for the following types of care:

- **★** Addiction Medicine Outpatient
- **★** Addiction Psychiatry Outpatient
- **★** Cardiology
- **★** Dermatology
- * Endocrinology
- **★** Eye Care Examination
- ★ Family and Couples Psychotherapy Outpatient
- **★** Gastroenterology
- **★ Neurology and Otology**

- **★** Mental Health Outpatient
- **★ Nephrology**
- **★** Neurology
- **★ Nutrition Intervention** Services
- **★ Neuro-Ophthalmology**
- **★** Oculoplastic
- **★** Oncology and Hematology
- * Orthopedic General
- **★** Optometry Routine
- **★** Orthopedic Spine

- **★** Otolaryngology or ENT
- **★ Pain Management**
- ★ Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (Physiatry)
- **★ Podiatry**
- **★ Podiatry DS**
- * Pulmonary
- * Rheumatology
- **★ Sleep Medicine**
- **★** Urology
- * Urogynecology

You are encouraged to contact your local **VA Medical Center Community Care Office** with any questions about how these updates may affect your care.



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HOURS OF OPERATION

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