



AFSA Retiree and Veteran Affairs Newsletter

- QUESTIONS ON SURVIVOR OR DEPENDENT RESOURCES?

The following guides can help you and your family deal with grief and other challenges you may be facing and direct you to other services available to service members and families.

A Survivor's Guide to Benefits: Taking Care of Our Families describes the responsibilities of your casualty assistance officer, offers information about memorial services and funerals, lists survivor benefits and contains links to resources. You may download a copy of this free from Military OneSource.

The Days Ahead helps surviving family members by providing resources — including listings of support organizations and programs, books and websites on grief and loss, and advice for coping with the loss of their loved one.

National Resource Directory is an online partnership for wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans, their families and families of the fallen, and those who support them.

Support organizations

Many other organizations offer support by people who understand grief and may have been through a similar experience. A full listing of support and service organizations is available in the publication "The Days Ahead." Organizations include:

- The American Widow Project provides military widows with support through peer-based support programs designed to educate, empower, inspire and assist in taking steps forward in their lives
- American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. is an organization of mothers whose sons or daughters died in the line of duty or died because of injuries while on active duty. It has more than 150 chapters nationwide. Husbands and children of members of American Gold Star Mothers may join as associate members
- Gold Star Dads of America, Inc. is an organization that helps fathers who suffered the death of a son or daughter in the military, enabling them to honor and remember their loved ones and to support each other in their loss. The organization aims to provide public awareness of America's gold star family community and to celebrate and honor America's combat veterans and their families
- Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. is a congressionally chartered organization that provides information to active-duty and service-connected widows and widowers on pertinent matters such as benefits and legislative and support services. Persons have an opportunity to connect with others in similar situations through volunteer work in community, military and veterans hospitals and through organizational support for important contributions like the Veterans Memorial Projects

- The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, or TAPS, is a 24/7 tragedy-assistance resource for anyone who has suffered the death of a military loved one, regardless of the relationship to the deceased or the circumstance of the death. The program provides comfort and care through comprehensive services and programs including peer-based emotional support, casework assistance, connections to community-based care and grief and trauma resources
- TAPS also provides resources for suicide survivors. There is a special suicide loss chat each month, and the organization holds an annual gathering for suicide survivors in the fall.

- JUNE IS MEN'S HEALTH MONTH

What are men's concerns when it comes to healthy eating? Certain vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients are essential to help prevent chronic diseases, including heart disease and cancer. Go for foods first instead of supplements to meet your micronutrient needs. Vegetables are key to getting enough antioxidants in your diet. Aim for 3 cups every day. Make ½ of your plate veggie-centered. Here are some tasty ways to increase your veggie intake!

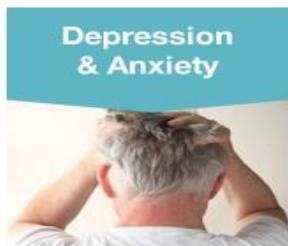
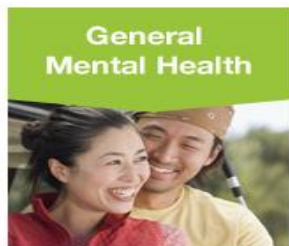
- Asparagus, beets, bell peppers, broccoli and sweet potatoes are packed with vitamin C. Try roasting sweet potato wedges for a side dish or tuck bell pepper slices into your sandwich.
- Grilled asparagus, bell peppers, onions, and summer squash are delicious when paired with fish
- Stir-fry a mixture of carrots, snap peas, mushrooms, asparagus, broccoli and cauliflower for a colorful fiber-rich side dish or sneak some chopped spinach, onions, and tomatoes into your morning omelet
- Tired of boring lettuce-based salads? Use spinach instead for a huge vitamin boost
- Snack on hummus with dippers from sliced bell peppers, cucumbers, carrots, celery and broccoli
- Grilled veggie kebabs – the possibilities are endless... enjoy chunks of peppers, onions, tomatoes, mushrooms, zucchini and eggplant
- Try some fun varieties of regular vegetables – like orange cauliflower, purple carrots, golden beets or white asparagus
- Summer squashes are abundant now – look for zucchini, yellow squash, pattypan squash and grey squashes and steam or grill them briefly

More veggie ideas for your healthy plate.

https://www.move.va.gov/docs/NewHandouts/Nutrition/N30_Vegetables.pdf

- CONTINUOUS LEARNING

For VA Mental Health Self-Help Resources Click [here](#) for general information and a guide to resources



Self-help resources are NOT to replace clinical therapy and treatment. If you feel you are in crisis or have thoughts of hurting yourself, please contact **VETERAN CRISIS Line (1-800-273-8255 and Press 1)** for help.

- VA EMPLOYEE EMPOWERS HER WOMEN VETERAN PEERS



VA's Center for Women Veterans is advancing a cultural transformation throughout VA and aims to serve as a portal – monitoring and coordinating VA's benefit services, outreach and programs – for women Veterans. One advocate is Ashley Gorbulja-Maldonado, a VBA employee and Army National Guard Veteran, who empowers other women Veterans with her mantra, "I can, I will... watch me."

While Gorbulja-Maldonado found a purpose raising money for homeless women Veterans and their children by participating in Ms. Veteran American, advocating for business resources through Veterati, working with the American Legion, and presenting at workshops and conferences and more, she's also worked to get her own women Veteran peers to actively engage with VA's Women's Health Services, the Center for Women Veterans, and the Office of Suicide Prevention.

Since the suicide rate for women Veterans is approximately twice that of non-Veteran women, and recent studies have shown the rate of suicide to be higher among women who report having experienced military sexual trauma (MST), Gorbulja-Maldonado's mantra stresses setting the example for others to follow – including coming to VA. "For women feeling alone, I want them to remember that their feelings are just as important as their male counterparts, and that there are many people and resources who are there for them," she said.

VA has enhanced the provision of care to staffing Women's Health Primary Care Providers (WH-PCP) at every site of VA care. VA has implemented care delivery models that ensure women Veterans receive equitable, timely, high-quality primary health care from a single primary care provider.

"We know that national VA satisfaction and quality data indicate women who are assigned to a Women's Health Primary Care Provider have higher satisfaction and higher quality of gender-specific care than those assigned to other providers," said Dr. Patricia Hayes, VA Chief Consultant for Women's Health Services. "And they are twice as likely to choose to stay in VA care over time. That is why we are concentrating our efforts on training staff and actively recruiting additional providers with experience in women's health care.

Dr. Lisa Kearney, Acting Deputy Director of VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, says that women Veterans have choices with their health care. They can choose a provider's gender, gender-sensitive treatment options, women-specific residential treatment programs, and more.

"Women Veterans are encouraged to voice their request," Kearney said. "We empower them to voice their concerns, talk with their mental health champions and state what they need so they are heard." "Remember, the VA is your home," Hayes-Byrd added. "You earned it and you deserve it, so use it!"

Women Veterans can connect with VA services by calling or texting the Women Veteran Call Center at 855-VA-Women (855-829-6636).

- NON-PATIENT VISITOR POLICY

As part of the VA's moving forward plan, some of the VA Health Care System has implemented a gradual re-opening of its campus and community clinics for non-urgent in-person appointments and elective procedures. During the gradual expansion of our services, we will continue to maximize technology to minimize physical contact.

In order to protect Veterans and staff from possible exposure to COVID-19, all of our VA Health Care facilities are limiting all non-patient visitors to one individual over the age of 18 who is providing direct medical assistance to the patient. Anyone who is not a direct caregiver for the Veteran's appointment will not always be permitted entry.

We will keep you informed of our progress as we work to expand our services, or if we have to strategically pause to modify our recovery plans. For more information, please check with your local VA Health Care System.

- NO VETERAN SHOULD BE WITHOUT A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Free Help for Homeless Veterans* Dial 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838) for 24/7 access VAs services for homeless and at-risk Veterans

Homeless Veteran Chat Confidential, 24/7 online support for homeless Veterans and friends
<https://www.va.gov/homeless> for more information

- GIFT CARDS FOR HOMEBOUND VETERANS

To assist Veteran families who may be experiencing financial challenges, the Independence Fund established a new program, Independence@Home, to help homebound Veterans with emergent costs like rent, utilities, childcare, transportation, and grocery and medical product delivery. Now the program has expanded to offer qualifying Veterans \$100 gift cards.

Independence at home <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/75056/independence-fund-expands-gift-cards-veterans/>

- LEARN THE LATEST FROM VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION (VBA)

Stay up to date on all things benefits by checking out the new webcast from the Under Secretary for Benefits, Paul R. Lawrence, Ph.D. Learn how VBA has been working to [improve benefit services for Veterans and their families.](#)

-TED CAN HELP YOUR TRANSITION

Transitioning from military to civilian life can be overwhelming. That's why VA's Office of Transition and Economic Development (TED) is here to help you navigate benefit services and get the support you need. Find out how [TED can support you!](#)

- REMEMBER AFSA – WE COULD USE YOUR HELP

Your AFSA International Executive Council and Headquarters staff hope and pray each of you, your family and friends are all safe while we are amid these life altering times. Just as your personal and professional lives have been disrupted, so has your Air Force Sergeants Association's ability to do their jobs. AFSA is complying with state and local guidance in order to keep your staff safe.

Springtime has traditionally been an incredibly good recruiting and retention period for AFSA. However, COVID-19 has severely curtailed our ability to reach out and personally interact with our members and potential members. We congratulate our Divisions and those chapters who are conducting virtual meetings to carry on the AFSA spirit. However, the overall result is fewer members are joining and we are experiencing a marked decrease in our projected revenues; revenues necessary to sustain operations and continue working on your behalf.

AFSA's leadership and staff continue working diligently through this pandemic and the challenges it presents. However, AFSA could use your assistance in order to help us work through these challenges and ensure we can continue the same level of effort on behalf of our membership. How can you help AFSA? If you can, a donation, in any amount, from our Chapters, our individual members, or both will be greatly appreciated. This is strictly voluntary on your part, but your assistance will help the AFSA meet our monthly obligations.

How can you donate? There are a couple of ways available to you. First, you may send a check to AFSA. Secondly, you may go directly to the AFSA web site and clicking on the AFSA DONATE button on the front page. Your association thanks you in advance for your support and assistance.

- ARE YOU A VETERAN IN CRISIS OR CONCERNED ABOUT ONE?

Did you know that VA offers same day services in Primary Care and Mental Health at 172 VA Medical Centers across the country? Contact the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and press 1, Chat, or Text 838255.)