

# the link

JANUARY 2016  
VA NEBRASKA-WESTERN  
IOWA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM



**8** SOLUTIONS  
FOR YOUR  
RESOLUTIONS



## IMPROVING CARE

**B. DON BURMAN** Director, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

Welcome to the New Year. I'm always excited when we ring in a new year because it provides an exciting time of renewal, reflection and reinvigoration. What's more exciting is it provides us a time to reflect upon our vision, how we can improve ourselves personally, and how we can better serve our Veterans at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

This past year was exciting for me, because I was blessed to join this organization, which is well-known for being a leader within the Veterans Health Administration for providing exceptional care for more than 55,000 Veterans in our area. VA NWIHCS employees are innovative and committed to providing personalized, compassionate care to each and every Veteran whom we are privileged to serve.

As we enter 2016, we look forward to improving methods to provide high-quality health care to our Veterans. We will be rolling out two of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs' initiatives – MyVA and Leaders Developing Leaders – that are part of his focus to improve the delivery of care to our Veterans. Secretary Bob McDonald stated, "We want every Veteran to have a seamless, integrated and responsive VA customer service experience every time."

This starts with "unleashing the power of employees to embrace a positive, evolving culture."

To our employees, thank you for your commitment to serving our Veterans every day. To our Veterans, thank you for choosing VA Nebraska Western-Iowa Health Care System and allowing us to serve you every day.

## WHAT OUR PATIENTS ARE SAYING

*"I would like to thank the employees of the VA. All of my appointments have been within a timely manner and all of the people I have met seem to genuinely care. I am greatly thankful for the services I have received. Some have been life-saving!"*

## VA HISTORY TIDBIT

In January 1946, the then-Veterans Administration's Department of Medicine and Surgery was authorized by Congress and signed into law by President Truman. The law placed VA medical operations into the hands of qualified medical professionals at the highest level. Functions of the new Department of Medicine and Surgery were set in law as "those necessary for a complete medical and hospital service ... for the medical care and treatment of Veterans." Among the important changes created by the law was the establishment of a medical residency program. Gen. Paul R. Hawley, M.D., assistant administrator for Medicine and Surgery, wanted VA hospitals located in close proximity to medical schools to provide training opportunities for future doctors and expose Veterans' to the newest philosophies and treatments in medical care. As a result, VA hospitals built after 1946 were located in urban areas near medical schools. The alliances between VA and American medical schools have helped all parties involved, fueling phenomenal research efforts and medical advancements that improve the lives of Veterans in countless ways. The residency program's success led to establishment of the VA medical internship program, and today more than half of all American doctors and other medical professionals receive some portion of their training in a VA hospital or medical center.

# the link this month

**FACT: THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BEGAN PUBLICLY POSTING PATIENT ACCESS DATA ONLINE IN JUNE 2014. VA PROVIDES THIS ACCESS-TO-CARE INFORMATION TO VETERANS AND THE PUBLIC KNOWING THAT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY WILL HELP IMPROVE CARE FOR VETERANS.**

**VIEW ACCESS DATA AT [WWW.VA.GOV/HEALTH/ACCESS-AUDIT.ASP](http://WWW.VA.GOV/HEALTH/ACCESS-AUDIT.ASP)**

“My greatest accomplishment and satisfaction of working in the VA Health Care System for the past 26 plus years has been being an advocate for our Veterans.”

Linda Buffington  
Program Analyst, Business Office, Omaha VAMC



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Cover: NWHCS Dietitian Natalie Vankat prepares healthy recipes while Dietetic Tech Kelsi Dillon hands out samples in the lobby of the Omaha VAMC, Dec. 17. The team provided recipes for protein pancakes, apple-cranberry crunch and BLT avocado salad. Photo by Anna Morelock.

This magazine is an authorized publication for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWHCS). Contents of The Link are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, or the Department of Veterans Affairs. The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the VA NWHCS Public Affairs Office.

### CONTACT US

Have a story idea? Call the VA NWHCS Public Affairs Office; Will Ackerman at 402-995-4719 or Anna Morelock at 402-995-5547 or email [vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov](mailto:vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov).

### VISIT US ONLINE

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# Veterans Voice Compliments Concerns, at Monthly Forums

BY ANNA MORELOCK Public Affairs

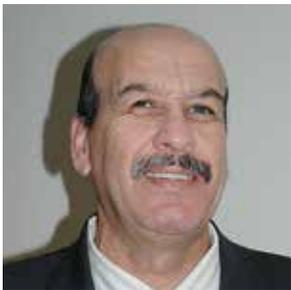
**V**eterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald mandated quarterly town halls be held at all VA medical centers. At VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, forums will be held monthly beginning in 2016 at different sites across the health care system.

VA NWIHCS Director Don Burman announced his intent to host monthly town halls to a group of about 25 Veterans who attended a Dec. 8 town hall in Omaha. Questions ranged from concerns about the Veterans Choice Program to questions on nursing home contracts. A panel including the VA NWIHCS executive team, business office and mental health staff was on hand at the town hall to field questions. While the director acknowledged the group may not be able to answer each question that evening, follow up would be provided.

**JANUARY VETERANS TOWN HALL**  
**Wednesday, Jan. 27, 5:30 to 7:30 pm**

**DAV Post, 4515 F Street**  
**Omaha, Nebraska**

## HELAL (RAMZY)



### HARB

*Chief, Engineering  
Service*

**24 YEARS SERVICE**  
**2 YEARS AT NWIHCS**

#### WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ENTAIL?

*"I'm responsible for all design, construction and facility maintenance for the Omaha, Grand Island and Lincoln campuses."*

#### WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN NOT AT WORK?

*"My wife and son and I like going to the mall, especially Wal-Mart."*

#### WHAT DO YOU ❤️ ABOUT YOUR JOB:

*"(Leadership) cares about the employees. I believe they treat them well."*

## QUILT GUILD WRAPS VETERANS IN WARMTH

BY ANNA MORELOCK Public Affairs

The Omaha Quilters Guild presented almost 30 Quilts of Valor to Veterans Dec. 18 at the Omaha VA Medical Center. This was the fifth year the guild has presented Quilts of Valor at the Omaha VAMC. Quilts also have been presented recently at the Grand Island VA by the Loose Threads Sewing Circle from Superior, Neb., and in Lincoln during the monthly Coffeehaus. Across the country, quilting groups have stitched and donated more than 130,000 Quilts of Valor to service members and Veterans.

*Veteran Victor Purvis receives a quilt from the Omaha Quilters Guild during the Dec. 18 presentation of the Quilts of Valor at the Omaha VA Medical Center.*



Photo by Anna Morelock

# VA Makes Changes to Veterans Choice Program

## Changes Remove Barriers and Expand Access to Care

**WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs announced in December a number of changes to make participation in the Veterans Choice Program easier and more convenient for Veterans who need to use it.** The move, which streamlined eligibility requirements, followed feedback from Veterans along with organizations working on their behalf.

“As we implement the Veterans Choice Program, we are learning from our stakeholders what works and what needs to be refined,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “It is our goal to do all that we can to remove barriers that separate Veterans from the care they deserve.” To date, more than 400,000 medical appointments have been scheduled since the Veterans Choice Program went into effect on Nov. 5, 2014.

### **Under the old policy, a Veteran was eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she met the following criteria:**

- Enrolled in VA health care by 8/1/14 or able to enroll as a combat Veteran to be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program;
- Experienced unusual or excessive burden eligibility determined by geographical challenges, environmental factors or a medical condition impacting the Veteran’s ability to travel;
- Determined eligible based on the Veteran’s current residence being more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility.



### **Under the updated eligibility requirements, a Veteran is eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets at least one of the following criteria:**

- Told by his or her local VA medical facility that they will not be able to schedule an appointment for care within 30 days of the date the Veteran’s physician determines he/she needs to be seen or within 30 days of the date the Veteran wishes to be seen if there is no specific date from his/her physician;
- Lives more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician;
- Needs to travel by air, boat or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to his/her home;
- Faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature or simplicity or frequency of the care needed and whether an attendant is needed. Staff at the Veteran’s local VA medical facility will work with him or her to determine if the Veteran is eligible for any of these reasons; or
- Lives in a state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility, which includes: Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire (Note: this excludes New Hampshire Veterans who live within 20 miles of the White River Junction VAMC) and the United States territories (excluding Puerto Rico, which has a full service VA medical facility).

**Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program or wanting to know more about it, can call 1-866-606-8198 to confirm their eligibility and to schedule an appointment. For more details about the Veterans Choice Program and VA’s progress, visit: [www.va.gov/opa/choiceact](http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact).**

# Counselors VITAL to Colleg

**W**hile many college students are away from home for the first time, 18 and fresh out of high school, Veteran students bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom. Sometimes, however, their knowledge and experiences create challenges of their own. That's when college outreach social workers Barb Shupe and David Rutherford step in as a part of the VITAL program – Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership.

Besides schoolwork, many Veterans have jobs and families. Some may have health issues such as hearing problems, sleep

troubles and learning disabilities that make college a challenge. After returning from combat, some issues faced by other students may seem trivial. These are all situations where VITAL counselors can help.

Justin Otoski, a U.S. Army Veteran and president of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln Student Veterans Organization, said Shupe has been a great resource for him since he started back to school. UNL counselors are great about advising on education stressors, Otoski said, and VA is great when transitioning from the service. Shupe, however, has been able to help him bridge challenges in all areas to succeed.



*“These folks have had life experience like nothing else. There’s just a lot of challenges and stresses they see on a daily basis.”*

*Barb Shupe,  
VITAL Outreach  
Social Worker*



# The Transition for Veterans

BY ANNA MORELOCK Public Affairs

Last semester, Otoski said he was overwhelmed with school and wasn't sure where to turn. Shupe, he said, helped him come up with a plan to help balance his school, work and family life.

"Having her on campus makes it so much easier," Otoski said. "She's a great person that really helps out the Vets in a unique way."

The VITAL program has four goals – to ensure Veterans are enrolled for health care; to educate faculty and staff on Veterans' issues; to help Veterans troubleshoot any issues they have with school; and to provide outreach to Veterans who may not know what services are available to them.

"These folks have had life experience like nothing else," Shupe said. "There's just a lot of challenges and stresses they see on a daily basis."

Shupe and Rutherford have a presence at six colleges and universities in Nebraska: the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and at Kearney, Doane College, Kaplan University, Southeast Community College and Central Community College.

Shupe said some Veterans just stop by once to get information; others visit regularly for help.

For more information about VITAL, visit the A to Z services page at [www.nebraska.va.gov](http://www.nebraska.va.gov) or call Shupe at 402-676-4261.

From left: Kate Packard, Kaplan University, Omaha and Lincoln Campus president; Jennifer Heritage, Kaplan admissions advisor; Lori Wardlow, NWHCS transition care management Administrative Officer and Program Manager; Barb Shupe, NWHCS VITAL counselor; Dr. Ahsan Naseem, NWHCS associate chief of staff for Telehealth Services; and Michael Klacik, Kaplan director of Admissions, cut the ribbon for the opening of the VITAL office November 2015 at the Kaplan University campus in Lincoln.



Courtesy Photo

## VITAL SERVICES FOR VETERANS:

- Connect to treatment for adjustment, stress, anger, depression, anxiety, sleep problems and PTSD.
- Refer and work with campus disability services to request academic accommodations.
- Support with processes regarding academic actions and/or conduct issues.
- Assist with enrollment and care at the VA health care system.
- Obtain help and resources from within the VA and its affiliates including: Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Support with obtaining and using assistive technology such as hearing aids and screen-reader software.
- Support with development of Student Veteran Peer Groups including Student Veterans of America chapters (SVA) [www.studentveterans.org](http://www.studentveterans.org)

## SERVICES FOR ACADEMIC FACULTY/STAFF:

- Education for college/university staff about military and Veteran culture.
- Consultation regarding Veteran-specific issues that impact performance and retention.
- Work with college/university counseling centers in serving the unique mental health needs of Veterans.
- Assist with communication between the VA health care system and college/university staff.

# SOLUTIONS FOR YOU

## Nutrition Services Demonstrate to Veterans, Employees

**AS** the New Year begins, many people across the nation make a New Year's resolution.

The majority of New Year's resolutions are to lose weight, get in shape, and to live a healthier lifestyle. According to a poll sponsored by General Nutrition Centers, about 40 percent of Americans promise to lose weight and 55 percent make resolutions to eat healthier. However, only 15 to 20 percent of people who make resolutions actually carry them out. People often lose their motivation because they get bored or do not see quick results. Here are some tips to help you keep your own New Year's resolutions.

When thinking of New Year's resolutions, prepare ahead of New Year's Day, outline your plan, and set achievable goals. To avoid reacting to how you feel on one given day, do not wait until the last minute to plan your resolution. Think ahead of time about what you would like to accomplish and what you will do if you break a part of your resolution. Anticipate that you might take a few steps backward in the journey toward your new habit and arrange consequences for yourself if you go back to an old behavior. Setbacks are opportunities to refine your plan so that you stick with it as you get back on track. Do not be afraid to start over again because there is no reason that you can't make resolutions any time of the year.

NWIHCS Dietitian Natalie Vankat prepares healthy recipes while Dietetic Tech Kelsi Dillon hands out samples in the lobby of the Omaha VAMC. The team provided recipes for protein pancakes, apple-cranberry crunch and BLT avocado salad.



Photo by Anna Morelock

# OUT RESOLUTIONS

BY KATIE HARTOIN Dietetic Intern,  
Hines VA Medical Center, Hines, IL

## How to Improve Nutrition in Every Day Recipes

In order to accomplish your objective, create a goal that will be a challenge but is still realistic. Find a support group of friends and family who will help you in your plan to change for the better. Your support group can help to motivate and push you to keep your resolutions. Short-term goals are easy to keep and small accomplishments will help keep you motivated. Keep track of each small success you make toward reaching your larger goal. Finally, it is important to reward yourself and celebrate any success by treating yourself to something that you enjoy.

According to research, most people do not realize that it takes about three weeks for a new activity to become a habit, and six months for it to become part of your personality. Stick to your resolution and do not give up. This can be your year to make the change you've been planning!

### VA NUTRITION SERVICES

The VA health care system is one of the largest employers of dietitians in the United States. VA dietitians serve the Nation's Veterans and families by promoting good nutrition, health and well-being. For reliable nutrition information or to locate a VA registered dietitian, visit the Nutrition and Food Service website at [www.va.gov/nfs](http://www.va.gov/nfs).

## PROTEIN PANCAKES (2 servings)

### INGREDIENTS

½ c. whole wheat flour  
1 non-fat, vanilla Greek yogurt  
1 tsp baking soda  
2 egg whites  
Non-stick cooking spray

### WHAT DO I DO?

*In a medium-sized bowl, mix together flour, Greek yogurt, baking soda and egg whites. Spray skillet with non-stick cooking spray. Cook pancakes, over low-medium heat on one side until bubbles form; then flip. Cook other side for 1-2 minutes. Serve topped with peanut butter or sugar-free syrup.*

### Nutrition Facts

Serving Size:	2, 4" pancakes
<b>Calories</b>	178.5
<b>Total Fat</b>	0.7 g
Saturated Fat	0.1 g
Polyunsaturated Fat	0.0 g
Monounsaturated Fat	0.1 g
<b>Cholesterol</b>	2.5 mg
<b>Sodium</b>	85.0 mg
<b>Potassium</b>	0.0 mg
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b>	30.2 g
<b>Dietary Fiber</b>	3.9 g
<b>Sugars</b>	6.7 g
<b>Protein</b>	4.1 g

## BLT SALAD WITH AVOCADO (4 servings)

### INGREDIENTS

12 slices lean center cut bacon, baked and chopped  
4 roma tomatoes  
1/4c NF Plain Greek Yogurt  
Black pepper to taste  
6c chopped romaine lettuce  
1 medium avocado, diced

### WHAT DO I DO?

*In a medium bowl, combine the diced tomatoes with the Greek yogurt. Season with pepper. Set aside for 10 minutes to let the tomatoes release their juices. Mix in the romaine lettuce and bacon. Top with diced avocado.*

### Nutrition Facts

Serving Size:	2 cups
<b>Calories</b>	82.2
<b>Total Fat</b>	10.7 g
Saturated Fat	1.7 g
Polyunsaturated Fat	0.8 g
Monounsaturated Fat	4.2 g
<b>Cholesterol</b>	23.8 mg
<b>Sodium</b>	345.9 mg
<b>Potassium</b>	219.3 mg
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b>	15.5 g
<b>Dietary Fiber</b>	5.2 g
<b>Sugars</b>	8.6 g
<b>Protein</b>	8.6 g

Recipes provided by VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Nutrition Services.

# Veteran Health Education Resource Center

BY **JAN CARLIN** My HealthVet Coordinator

# Now Open

**L**earning Resource Service officially opened VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care Systems' second Veteran Health Education Resource Center Dec. 17, this one at the Lincoln VA.

Access to information and empowering Veterans through education is an important part of patient-centered care. The VA's practice of patient-centered care incorporates education and training for skill building in behavior and lifestyle change, preventive care, and illness and disease care shifting the role of the Veteran in his or her health.

The Veteran Health Education Resource Center is located in Room 170 at the Lincoln VA and includes access to My HealthVet, wireless internet, and an array of patient education materials.

Staff is available from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday to provide Veterans with My HealthVet assistance and computer coaching. Veterans may access and complete the Healthy Living Assessment in My HealthVet, their E-Benefits account and other helpful websites.



Photo by Bruce Thiel

From left: Kim Shambaugh-Miller, Lincoln VA nurse manager; Jan Carlin, MyHealthVet Coordinator; Linda Floyd, Lincoln VA administrative officer; Amy Rosauer, NWHCS Learning Resources acting chief; Booker Young, MyHealthVet Assistant; Duncan Fallon, Lincoln VA site manager; and Char Thiessen, NWHCS Learning Resources chief, cut the ribbon on the new Veterans Health Education Center at the Lincoln VA.

For more information about the Veterans Health Education Center, contact Jan Carlin, NWHCS My HealthVet Coordinator at 402-995-4966.

## EMPLOYEE

# Update

### WELCOME

**Boyd Short**, Chaplain Service

**Michael Aherns**, Environment Management Service

**Tony Anguiano**, Environment Management Service

**Todd Arnett**, Environment Management Service

**Johnny Love**, Environment Management Service

**Timothy McGee**, Environment Management Service

**Stacey Capes**, Inpatient Nursing

**Jenette Osmer**, Inpatient Nursing

**Meera Patel**, Inpatient Nursing

**Jay Bruhl**, Office of Information and Technology

**Michael Worsley**, Mental Health

**Ann Hunter**, Outpatient Nursing

**Joseph Auxier**, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

**Brian Boer**, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

**Eyad Skaf**, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

**Robin Allen**, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

**Raymond Lines**, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

### GOODBYE

**Michele Gortemaker**, Audiology

**Marie Ann Millet**, Mental Health

**Luis Montilla**, Inpatient Nursing

**Trudy Mullins**, Inpatient Nursing

**Kelvin Roberts**, Food Service

**Stephen Straley**, Extended Care and Rehab

**Morgan Wilson**, Social Work

**Diane Losey**, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

### RETIRING

**Kurt Hoagland**, Mental Health

**Clarice Kulceski**, Business Office

# What is one thing most people don't know about you?



**Mary Kay Jordan**  
Quality Program Analyst  
Omaha VAMC

"I've served eight years as an U.S. Army combat medic."

**Angie Hamilton, CNA**  
7 East, Omaha VA Medical Center  
U.S. Army Reserve



"I am really shy."

**Patty Axtell, RN**  
Holdrege Community-Based  
Outpatient Clinic



"I have been a registered nurse for 40 years. My family has a history of serving at the VA: my mother worked at the Omaha VA Medical Center in the 60's. My grandfather was a VA chief of staff at the VA in Boise, Idaho, and Walla Wall, Wash., VAs.

"I lived and worked in the Middle East for four years working to fulfill U.S. military contracts."

**Scott Spofford**  
Supply Technician, Grand Island VA  
U.S. Army Veteran



## FINAL CFC TOTALS

OMAHA, BELLEVUE,  
SHENANDOAH

**\$43,705**

LINCOLN,  
NORFOLK

**\$12,103**

GRAND ISLAND,  
HOLDREGE,  
NORTH PLATTE:

**\$7,094**



**TOTAL:**

**\$62,902**

## JANUARY

For more information about VA NWIHCS events, visit [www.nebraska.va.gov](http://www.nebraska.va.gov).

- 4 Veterans Food Pantry, Lincoln
- 5 Laughter Therapy and Yoga for Veterans, Omaha
- 6 Veterans Food Pantry, Omaha
- 7 Women Veterans Yoga, Omaha  
Yoga, Grand Island  
Pain Options Class, Omaha
- 12 Pain Options Class, Lincoln
- 13-14 Bring Your 'A' Game to Work, Omaha
- 14 Women Veterans Yoga, Omaha  
Yoga, Grand Island
- 15 VA Coffeehaus, Lincoln
- 18 Martin Luther King Jr. Day (federal holiday)
- 19 Laughter Therapy and Yoga for Veterans, Omaha
- 21 Women Veterans Yoga, Omaha  
Yoga, Grand Island
- 21 Pain Options Class, Omaha
- 26 Pain Options Class, Grand Island
- 27 OEF/OIF/OND Combat Veterans Social Group, Omaha
- 28 Yoga, Grand Island
- 28 Women Veterans Yoga, Omaha
- 28 VA and Community Book Club, Lincoln

## DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

REMEMBER!  
CELEBRATE!  
ACT!  
A DAY ON,  
NOT A DAY OFF!

JANUARY 18, 2016



# TAX ASSISTANCE<sup>\*</sup> *for free* by IRS Certified Volunteers

2015 Federal and Nebraska State Tax Returns

IRS tax consultants will be available to answer questions about current or past IRS issues.



No appointments necessary, first-come first-serve basis.  
Wait times are likely

*\*The volunteers are NOT certified to prepare complicated or business returns\**

For questions regarding the event contact:  
Jana Jacobson-Langhorst at 402-489-3802 ext. 6804

**VA**  
HEALTH  
CARE | Defining  
**EXCELLENCE**  
In the 21st Century

**Feb. 12, Feb. 26, March 11**

10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**April 8, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

**Veterans Affairs, Auditorium; 600 S. 70th St.; Lincoln, Nebraska**

**The Lincoln VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Association) Coalition will sponsor the outreach event to assist Veterans and VA employees with their tax returns.**

#### **Mandatory Items** *(Required by IRS regulation)*

- Social security cards for each person being filed on, including children
- Photo ID for adults
- Checking or saving account numbers, bank routing numbers

#### **Needed** *(if applicable to you)*

- Pension statements
- 1095s showing creditable health insurance coverage
- Child care information
- A copy of last year's taxes
- Statements from school showing the breakdown of expenses/credits and any 1098T received
- W-2's from employment
- Any other pertinent tax information



**Veterans Health  
Administration**

*Nebraska-Western Iowa  
Health Care System*

402-346-8800 | 1-800-451-5796  
[www.nebraska.va.gov](http://www.nebraska.va.gov)