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Marshfield Clinic offers individualized approach for military and Veterans

Marshfield Clinic is offering a new service to help Wisconsin's rural veterans navigate through the complexities of healthcare and get the care they need.

Veteran Services Care Coordinators are now located in Marshfield and Ladysmith to work with veterans to connect them to healthcare, community services, and earned Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. Funded through a contract with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Rural Health, these coordinators will meet with veterans in person or via phone to discuss health needs and develop an action plan. Topics may include:

- Military service history
- Enrollment, involvement and information about VA benefits, including VA Healthcare
- Screening of preventive health, social determinants of health, PACT Act eligibility related to presumptive diagnoses, and mental health.
- Health-related goals
- Collaboration with health care providers and related services across VA & community partners

“This is an exciting time, as we’re making great strides in our military and veterans’ programs at Marshfield Clinic, including the launch of the VetCoor program and hiring of two new coordinators, to better serve those who’ve served,” said Bryan Weichelt, Ph.D., program lead, veteran, and chair of the growing, 100-plus member, Military Community business resource group, comprised of Marshfield Clinic employees.

Veteran Services Care Coordinators will collaborate with Marshfield Clinic’s Community Connections and Veteran Service teams, researchers, providers, discharge planners, as well as colleagues at the Department of Veterans Affairs Community Care Network (VA CCN), Outpatient VA clinics and medical centers, County Veteran Service Officers and other community partners.

“We are excited to work with the VA Office of Rural Health to improve the experience of our veteran and military patients,” said Lea Buckridge, registered nurse and assistant manager for the new VetCoor team.

To contact this team, email vetcoor@marshfieldclinic.org or call Marshfield at 715-387-5570 or Ladysmith at 715-323-3239.

Creating more opportunities to care for Veterans

The veteran service care coordinator program is the latest in a series of steps Marshfield Clinic has taken to improve health care access for veterans.

In 2023, Marshfield Clinic formed a veteran’s service team to manage authorizations for veterans that are using the VA CCN. Anytime an eligible veteran chooses to utilize VA CCN, their care must be authorized, which can become complex when there are multiple office visits, testing and referrals to specialists.

“We have the privilege to provide veterans their health care,” Buckridge said. “They have earned this coverage. We know these processes can be complex and we’re here to help.”

In 2024, Marshfield Clinic began [asking patients about having been in the military or if they are currently serving](#). This set of questions intends to better identify, diagnose and treat military and veterans.

Coupling ongoing data collection with the new VetCoor program enables our teams to better assist and educate veterans.

“We are still somewhat early in the process of operationalizing these data for practical use, but we do already have several stories of impact,” Weichelt said. “In more than one instance our efforts led to the veteran uncovering additional benefits they are eligible for, such as VA-funded healthcare and their dependents’ waived college tuition at a Wisconsin state university.”

Military and Veterans Service Care Coordination team

Elliot Alcantara in Marshfield and Teresa Meyers in Ladysmith are the Veteran Service Care Coordinators available to assist in ensuring veterans’ needs are being met in rural Wisconsin. Both military veterans themselves, they bring a mix of educational backgrounds and lived experiences well-suited to serve this population.

Alcantara served 13 years in the U.S. Army as an Infantryman. During his service, he was deployed for nearly four years to Iraq and Afghanistan, with most of his time served in the 173rd Airborne Brigade, based out of Vicenza, Italy from 2003-2009. Among other military accomplishments and awards, Alcantara completed the U.S. Army's elite Ranger course, and was awarded The Bronze Star, The Purple Heart, and The Army Commendation Medal with Valor device. He was medically retired in 2015, after his fourth deployment.

"My role here as a Veterans Service Coordinator is important because I am a veteran myself who had my own challenges with navigating VA healthcare and connecting to other community agencies," Alcantara said. "I'm excited to be here and let veterans know that one of them is here to help."

Meyers served as Administrative Specialist and Environmental Health Specialist in the U.S. Army Reserve. She was stationed on reserve duty at the 12th Medical Detachment (Preventive Medicine) and 180th Medical Detachment (Entomology) in Beloit, Wisconsin. Meyers also served on active duty during Operation Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia.

Inspired by her reserve unit's primary mission of preventive medicine, Meyers became interested in keeping fellow troops safe and healthy.

"I recently became a disabled veteran, and I know from experience that navigating the VA system can get confusing very quickly," Meyers said. "Based on these experiences, I believe that my role as a VetCoor can help reduce the stress for my fellow veterans by providing help they need in obtaining the information necessary at a time when they need the help the most."

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Marshfield Clinic Health System, now Marshfield Clinic region of Sanford Health, is an integrated health system whose mission is to enrich lives through accessible, affordable compassionate health care. The health system serves Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula with more than 1,400 providers comprising 170 specialties, health plan, and research and education programs. Primary operations include more than 60 Marshfield Clinic locations, 11 hospitals, Marshfield Children's Hospital, Marshfield Clinic Research Institute, Security Health Plan and Marshfield Clinic Health System Foundation.

Sanford Health serves patients and communities across the upper Midwest, including South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wyoming, Iowa, Wisconsin and the upper

peninsula of Michigan. The organization includes nearly 56,000 employees, 56 hospitals, 4,500 providers, two fully integrated health plans, specialty pharmacies and nationally recognized research institutions. Sanford Health Plan and Security Health Plan will serve more than 425,000 members.