

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE FOR **VISN 10** VETERANS

SPRING • 2017

Veterans' Health

Seeing into a
Brighter Future

The Ringing
Pain of Tinnitus

FEATURED FACILITY:
Columbus VA
Ambulatory
Care Center





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Go to www.visn10.va.gov to read past issues of Veterans' Health. Click on the NEWS & EVENTS link.

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System VISN 10, one of the integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your health care and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System VISN 10 is:

- To provide Veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

To our readers

Springtime often feels synonymous with hope. In VISN 10, I'm pleased with the commitment that all of our facilities have in fulfilling the VA mission and their efforts in delivering hope to the thousands of Veterans throughout our network.



Robert P. McDivitt, Network Director

That progress includes the ongoing expansion of our Columbus VA Ambulatory Care Center. What started as a small operation has grown into a vital medical facility for Veterans in and around the Columbus area. Read more about this remarkable facility on page 3.

Tinnitus is the number one disability among Veterans and affects millions of Americans. Those with this condition complain of constantly hearing noise in their ears. VA audiologists are making great strides in helping Veterans manage this chronic condition. Read about it on page 4.

When you suffer from low vision, the world can seem like a dark place. But, places like the Cleveland VA Blind Rehabilitation Center are turning the light on! Learn more on page 9.

And, turn to the back cover to read about the 37th Annual National Wheelchair Games, being held this July in Cincinnati, Ohio!

Robert P. McDivitt, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 10

We're Here for You

The newly integrated VISN 10 is the second largest and most complex VISN in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). That means you'll receive some of the best care within the VA. If you're not sure how to get started, we want to help! Get connected with the facilities, doctors and Patient-Aligned Care Teams (PACTs) that will help you get the care you need.

To find the nearest VA medical centers or schedule an appointment, visit www.visn10.va.gov.



Facility Highlight:

Chalmers P. Wylie Columbus VA

Ambulatory Care Center

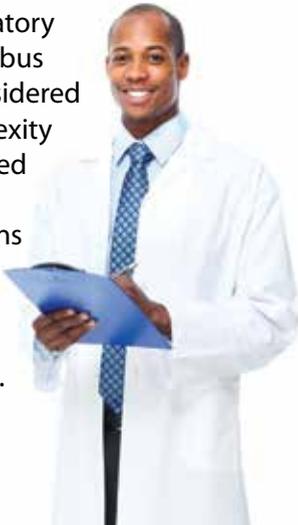


The Columbus VAACC was recognized in 2014 as a "Model Ambulatory Surgery" program from the national VA surgery office.

The Chalmers P. Wylie VA Ambulatory Care Center (VAACC) opened in 2008 and serves Veterans in 13 Ohio counties. Located in Columbus, Ohio, this is the parent facility for four community-based outpatient clinics located in:

- Grove City
- Newark
- Marion
- Zanesville

For an ambulatory center, Columbus VAACC is considered a high-complexity facility. It served more than 41,000 Veterans last year, and its programs and services keep growing.



"We're a facility that continues to grow," says Carl Higginbotham, Public Affairs Specialist. "We keep adding more and more services as we continue to serve more Veterans. We're an evolving facility."

The facility currently has several construction projects underway to make room for all this growth. This includes a recently completed audiology/specialty care center and a new off-site behavioral health clinic. Other projects include an enhanced main entrance and a parking garage. A new, centralized call center and urgent care center are also coming soon.



Spotlight on key services

Homeless Veteran Outreach: HCHV Outreach Workers provide ongoing services to homeless Veterans to help them find and maintain long-term housing.

Mental Health Treatment: The Behavioral Health Division's treatment teams deliver the most progressive treatments available. The VHA Office of Mental Health Operations (OMHO) recognized Columbus VA's "strong practice" for their Evidence-Based Practice Education (EBP) series.

Reaching OEF/OIF/OND Veterans: Columbus VA ACC has 11 employees dedicated solely to helping Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans and their families.

Veterans Transportation Service: This new program provides transportation to and from outpatient appointments for Veterans with special needs, and Veterans who don't have transportation.

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www.columbus.va.gov
www.facebook.com/VAColumbus

Hours of Operation:
8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Turning Down the Noise

VA uses different therapies to treat tinnitus



The trauma of war can cause a range of health issues, and topping that list is hearing problems. The constant barrage of noise from battle zones takes its toll on soldiers. The most recent conflicts, such as Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), were some of the noisiest on record. Roadside bombs were part of the everyday experience for military patrols. They caused immediate hearing loss and ringing in the ears – a condition known as “tinnitus.” For some Veterans, these hearing changes continued after leaving the service.



The number of Veterans with a service-connected disability for tinnitus has risen steadily over the past 10 years. Tinnitus is now the number one disability among Veterans. It also affects one in ten American adults.

Constant ringing in the ears can make people feel more isolated. The sound can hinder communication and make it hard to concentrate. These problems can affect work and change relationships with others. Veterans with tinnitus are also more likely to suffer from mental health conditions like depression and anxiety.

Noise is the primary cause of tinnitus, but head and neck trauma can also cause it. Many of today's soldiers also experience Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). This can lead to both mild and severe head injuries, as well as tinnitus. More than 60 percent of active duty soldiers who were wounded in action have eardrum injuries, tinnitus or hearing loss.

There is no cure for tinnitus. Most people can cope without any help, but the sound is too much for some to manage. The good news is there are a variety of treatment options available to help Veterans deal with the noise.



Dr. Mary Setsma, Au.D, tests Marine Veteran Susan Honaker's hearing at the VA Wyoming Health Care Center in Wyoming, Mich. Photo by Patrick Gault, Battle Creek VAMC.

VA doctors have had a lot of success treating tinnitus thanks to the use of the Progressive Tinnitus Management (PTM) approach. Using this model, doctors find what works best for the Veteran to help make tinnitus less of a problem. The focus is on educating Veterans about the condition. VA doctors also address any connected mental health issues.

"We encourage Veterans with tinnitus to avoid quiet places and to use the noise in their environment to their advantage," said Dr. Alison Eden, audiologist at the Dayton VA Medical Center. "When they get home from work, we tell them to put music on that's enjoyable."

A person with tinnitus may need more help coping at night or in quiet environments – when it may be harder to shut out unwanted sound. Some Veterans find a fan or a customized sound machine helpful. Others download a smartphone sound app or rely on a device that mixes sound and music.

A specialized hearing aid may help. Some hearing aids emit a low sound that helps to mask the noise from tinnitus.

"This is different from the usual hearing aid in that it offers no amplification," said Dr. Julie Gardner, clinical audiologist at the Dayton VA Medical Center. "It provides an audible stimulus to help people cope with and learn to manage their tinnitus. Some hearing aids can produce music that sounds like calming wind chimes."



Hearing Aids for Veterans



All Veterans enrolled in VA health care are eligible for audiology (hearing) health care services. And many Veterans can receive hearing aids from the VA for very little out-of-pocket cost. The VA provides access to all types of hearing aids. It works with seven different manufacturers to provide more choices for Veterans.

Hearing aids are free for Veterans with service-connected conditions. Other Veterans may need to pay a small co-pay. All Veterans have a 2 to 3-month trial period with a new hearing aid to make sure that they are satisfied. For a list of some VA-approved hearing aids, visit www.phonak.com/us/en/support/va/products-and-accessories.html.

Get Started:

First, register at the health administration/enrollment section of the VA Medical Center of your choice.

Once registered at the facility, you may contact the Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic directly, or you can ask your VA Primary Care Team to refer you to one.



Turn Back the Clock on Your Heart Age



What's your heart's age? If you think it's the same as what's on your driver's license, you might be mistaken. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that 75 percent of Americans have hearts that are "older" than their actual age. For men, the average heart age is 8 years older, and for women, it's 5 years. By improving your heart age, you can reduce your risk of heart attack, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and other health issues.

You can lower your heart age by adopting heart-healthy habits. Consider these tips to get started:



If you smoke, quit.

Quitting is hard and often requires help. Talk with your health care team about smoking cessation programs and resources.



Take your medicines as your doctor advises.

Don't stop taking blood pressure and cholesterol medications without talking with your doctor.



Get your blood pressure and cholesterol checked.

Uncontrolled high blood pressure and high cholesterol increase risks of heart attack and stroke.



Get regular exercise.

Walking, biking and swimming can help keep your heart healthy. Exercise for 30 minutes, five days a week.



Eat a heart-healthy diet.

This includes fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein. Eat less fried foods, fast food, and sugary desserts.



Aim for a healthy weight.

Calculate your BMI online, or talk with your doctor. Losing just 5 to 10 pounds has heart benefits.

VISN 10 Celebrates the 14th Annual Wear Red Day

Across the nation and within VISN 10, VA medical facilities celebrated the annual National Wear Red Day on Feb. 3, 2017. This day brings attention to the issue of heart disease and how it affects women. Heart disease is still the number one killer of women.



Staff and patients from the Ann Arbor VA Medical Center celebrated Wear Red Day on Feb. 3, 2017. VA medical centers across the nation spent the day raising awareness of heart disease risks, especially for women.

Shining Light on Skin Aging



The sun isn't your friend if you want to keep your skin looking young. Ultraviolet radiation from the sun's rays is largely responsible for this photoaging. The more we soak up the sun, the more we increase our risks. The sun may cause wrinkling and spotting, reduce skin elasticity, and cause skin cancer. In fact, it's estimated that 90 percent of skin aging is caused by the sun. Although your environment, genetics, what you eat, and other factors can contribute to skin aging, the sun is the biggest culprit. If you want to truly slow down the appearance of aging, the first step is blocking the sun's ultraviolet A and B rays.

A 2013 study found that using a sunscreen of at least SPF 30 with UVA and UVB protection can help keep your skin from burning and freckling, as well as premature aging. Regularly applying SPF 30 when you are outside can block up to 97 percent of UVB rays.



Sunlight can also cause:

- Slow-growing skin cancer tumors (keratoacanthomas)
- Pigment changes such as liver spots
- Thickening of the skin

Some additional tips for keeping your skin looking young:



Stop smoking. Smoking speeds up the aging process. It can cause wrinkles and dull your skin, giving it a sallow, yellow appearance.

Eat well. Eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables can slow down the skin-aging process. Avoid eating too much sugar, refined breads and other carbohydrates. These foods can speed up the aging process.

Drink less. Alcohol dehydrates skin, over time making it appear older than it is.

Work out. Exercise at least 30 minutes a day. This increases blood circulation throughout the body, which gives your skin a more youthful appearance.



Wash carefully. When you wash your skin, do it gently. Scrubbing too hard or using abrasive skin cleansers can irritate your skin, making you look older.

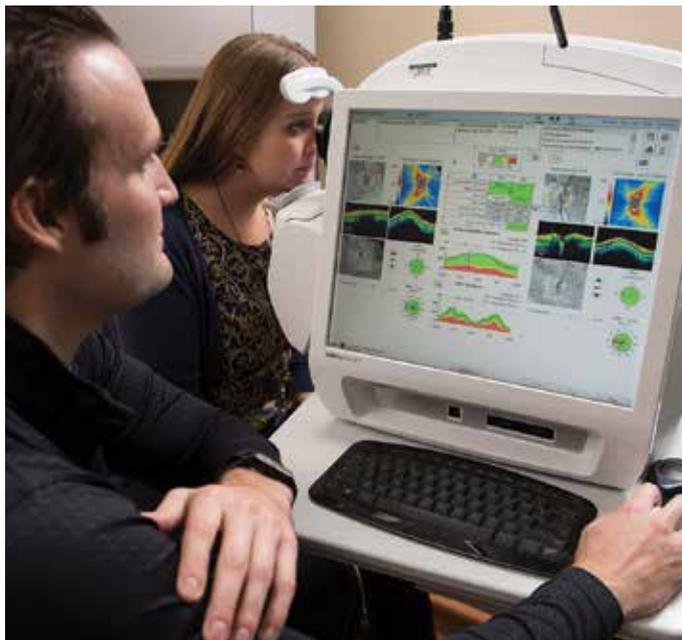
Stay in the shade, especially during midday hours.

Cover up. Wear lightweight clothing that covers your arms and legs. Wear a hat with a wide brim to shade your face, head, ears and neck. Wear sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays.



Aging and Our Eyes

As we age, many things in our bodies that used to work very well may start to lose some of their function. Our eyes are no different. From an early age, many people may deal with issues, such as nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism, that require them to wear corrective eyeglasses. But, aging can cause many other conditions that you'll need an optometrist or an ophthalmologist to help you manage. Talk to your PACT about how you can get help for these and other eye problems.



Battle Creek VAMC doctors, Brian Dernos, O.D., and Carla Gilbertson, O.D., test a color diagnostic machine they use to detect any eye health issues. Photo by Patrick Gault, Battle Creek VAMC.

Cataracts

By age 65, over half of all Americans will develop cataracts. And, almost all Americans will develop them at some point in their senior years. This starts as another issue – presbyopia – and affects people starting in their 40s. In this case, your crystalline lens starts having more difficulty focusing on objects within arm's reach. This is when you might need bifocals to see properly. As you age, the crystalline lens starts to lose its transparency and begins to turn yellow and opaque. This is what's considered a cataract.

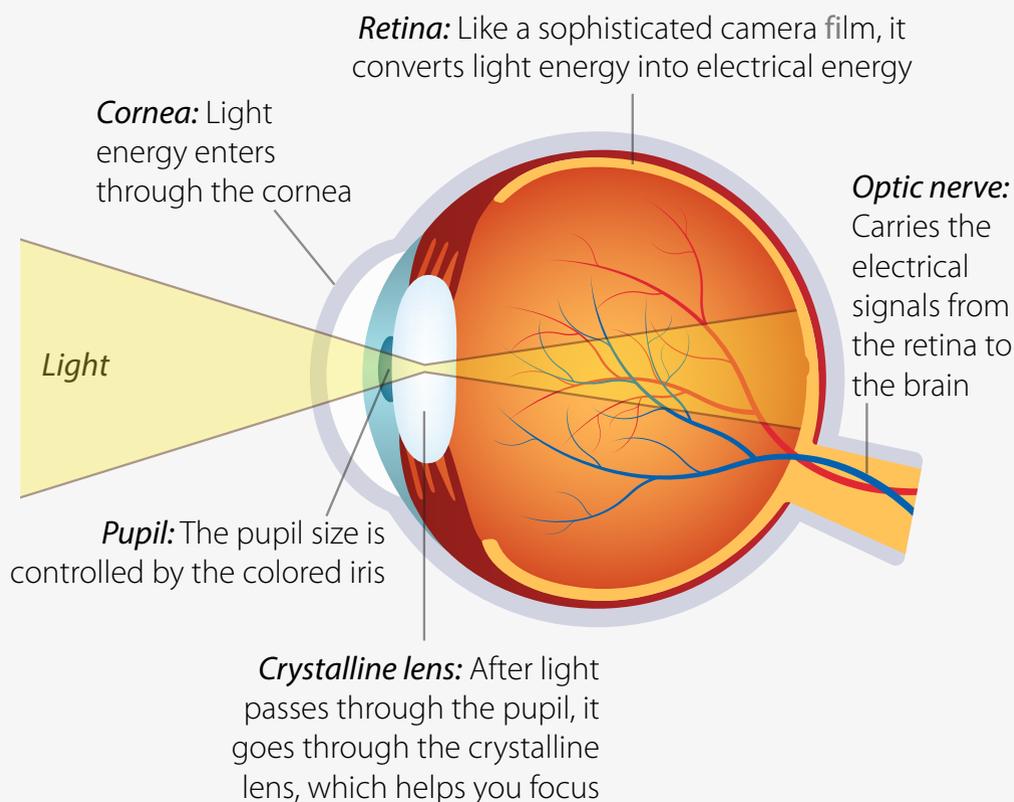
Color vision decline

As we age, colors can become less vibrant and the differences between them appear less distinct. Cataracts can contribute to this issue.

Loss of peripheral vision

The pupil size becomes smaller with age and that affects the amount of light needed for comfortable sight. Those in their 60s often need three times the "ambient" light compared to those in their 20s. This can affect peripheral vision.

How the Eye Works



Cleveland VA Facility Lights the Way

Glaucoma

Glaucoma is the leading cause of blindness for people over 60. It affects people of all ages, but especially older people. It is a disease that affects the optic nerve. It often happens when fluid builds up in the front part of your eye. As the pressure increases, the optic nerve is damaged. Early treatment can prevent blindness from glaucoma. There are often no symptoms in the early stages, so get screened regularly.

Macular Degeneration

Macular degeneration happens when the central part of the retina, called the macula, starts to deteriorate. When this happens, images are not received correctly, leading to vision loss. The biggest risk factor is age. But, your genetics, race and tobacco use also have an impact. The early stages often have no symptoms, so get regular screenings. There is no cure, however early treatment can help slow the disease's progress.

While most of the eye conditions outlined here are unavoidable, making healthy choices can slow the aging process a bit. Try to eat a healthy diet, get regular exercise, and live a tobacco-free lifestyle. Smoking and diabetes can speed up the aging process. Be sure to get regular eye exams to detect and treat any problems as early as possible.



There are few things more frightening than suddenly losing the ability to see properly. For many Veterans, this scenario may happen quickly without any warning. It may happen because of injuries sustained on the battlefield, eye diseases like macular degeneration, or due to the slow march of time. No matter the reason, Veterans may find they need to relearn how to do simple tasks because of low vision. The Cleveland VA Blind Rehabilitation Center is there to give visually impaired Veterans hope for the future.

The Cleveland VA center is an inpatient facility that opened in 2011. It has only 15 beds, but that's by design. The facility prides itself on its intimate setting. The center focuses on using what sight the Veteran may still have, and help them learn how to live as independently as possible.

"We don't have group training programs," said Diane Peters, Chief at the Cleveland VA Blind Rehabilitation Center. "It's all one instructor to one Veteran. We tailor their program with what goals they have presently."

Some of the tasks that Veterans learn include: using public transportation, using a cane or walker, orienting them to their surroundings, cooking, using a computer, etc. The center is located within the larger Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, so if patients need to schedule other non-vision-related appointments, it's all located in one place.

But, it's not just work, work, work all day. The center is conveniently situated among many different cultural attractions. So, patients may enjoy a day trip to a museum, concert or park. Patients can have a day of sailing, horse-back riding, or golfing; whatever suits them.

"Our community in Cleveland is rich in culture. We do trips constantly to those places," says Peters.

Who can participate?

Any visually impaired Veteran is eligible. Your primary care physician must clear you to participate in the intensive 28-day program. Ask your Health Care Team for information and a referral.

Minutes Count with a Stroke

About 15,000 Veterans suffer a stroke each year. During a stroke, brain cells are damaged due to a blood clot or rupture of a blood vessel in the brain. This can lead to serious disability or death.

If you are a caregiver of a Veteran, it is important that you understand the risk – and how to recognize the symptoms of a stroke. Visit the VA's RESCUE website for information: www.cidrr8.research.va.gov/rescue.

Preventing stroke

Health problems, such as atrial fibrillation (an irregular beating of the heart), high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes, increase your risk. Take medication and follow a heart-healthy lifestyle. Eat right, exercise, limit alcohol and don't smoke. See your doctor as recommended for health exams and screenings.

Aspirin may help reduce the risk of stroke due to a blood clot in women ages 55-79 years. Discuss the use of aspirin with your doctor before taking it.

WHAT TO DO

CALL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY.

Hospital emergency rooms have medication that can dissolve blood clots and restore blood flow to the brain. The window of opportunity is three hours. But, to receive treatment in time, patients must get to the hospital within 60 minutes. Don't wait — if you see signs of stroke, call 911!



KNOW THE SIGNS OF STROKE

The five most common signs and symptoms

SUDDEN numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg

SUDDEN confusion, trouble speaking or understanding others

SUDDEN trouble seeing in one or both eyes

SUDDEN dizziness, trouble walking or loss of balance or coordination

SUDDEN severe headache with no known cause

Be Safe as You Spring Clean



Just as the daffodils start appearing, you might get the itch to do some spring cleaning. It's always a good idea to throw open the windows and air out the house after many months of winter. Dig out your cleaning supplies and trash bags and have at it! But, before you go to town on your house and yard, consider these safety tips.

- **Ventilate as you clean.** Some household cleaners can create harsh fumes that make it difficult to breathe. Be sure to turn on the fan in your bathroom and wear gloves to protect your hands. Open the windows throughout your house. Do not mix products together. The contents could react with each other and become dangerous. Better yet, choose a non-toxic cleaning product. Find a list at www.ewg.org/guides/cleaners.

- **Don't try to move heavy furniture by yourself.** Yes, you may be curious to see what fell behind the stove and refrigerator over the last few months. But, you could seriously injure yourself if you move anything too heavy. Get help from a family member or friend first. These unintended injuries result in about 21 million medical care visits each year.
- **Clear the clutter.** Sometimes the mess has to get worse before it gets better. As you're filling up your house with trash bags and other debris to take to the curb, be careful you don't block exits or create new tripping hazards.
- **Watch where you're going.** It's easy to grab a bunch of boxes and bags at once to save time. But, that can cause serious fall risks. Only carry loads you can see over. If you're going up and down stairs, keep one hand free to hold the railing.

Clear Away Old Medicines

Every few months, take time to review what's in your medicine cabinet.

Remove any medicines that have reached their expiration date or you don't need to take anymore. Separate these items and put them in a safe place, locked up, until you can safely dispose them.

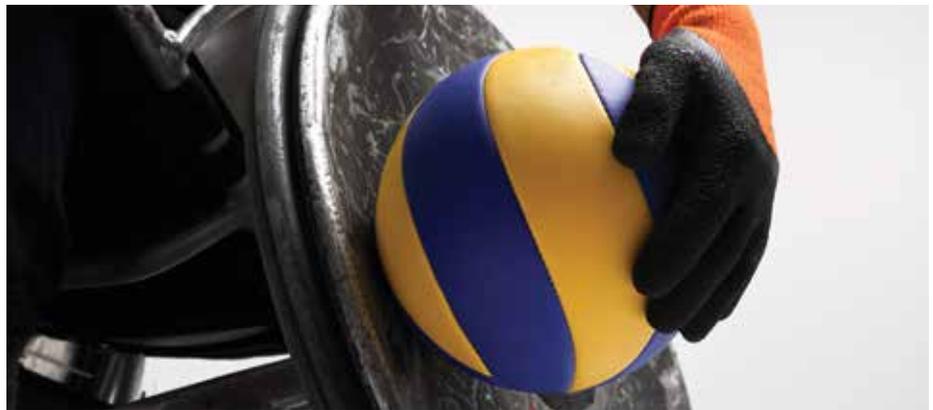


Where to bring your unwanted meds

Many VAs have a disposal process for unused medications. Talk to your VA pharmacist. You can also use the DEA locator to find a convenient site near you: www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/index.html for a list of take-back locations. Or, call 800-882-9539 for more information.



Wheelchair Games, July 17-22, Cincinnati, Ohio



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**You MUST complete and return this request form to continue to receive issues of Veterans' Health magazine by mail.*

Want to truly be inspired by the strength of the human spirit? Then you need to attend the 37th Annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG). This year's games will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio, July 17-22. The games draw disabled Veterans from across the country, and across the pond in Britain, to compete in a series of competitive athletic events.

Participation in the NVWG is open to Veterans with spinal cord injuries, amputations, multiple sclerosis or other neurological conditions who require a wheelchair for athletic competition. They must also be eligible to receive care at a VA medical facility. Visit wheelchairgames.org to learn more.

Veterans compete in the following events:

- 9-Ball
- Air guns
- Archery
- Basketball
- Boccia
- Bowling
- Hand cycling
- Field events
- Motor rally
- Power soccer
- Quad rugby
- Slalom
- Softball
- Swimming
- Table tennis
- Track
- Trapshooting
- Weightlifting

Want to help?

More than 3,000 local volunteers assist with all aspects of the Games. This includes transportation, event set-up, water distribution, meals, and other activities. To learn how you can sign up, visit wheelchairgames.org/get-involved.