

Facility Update and Information for Veterans Affected by Hurricane Sandy

November 6, 2012 – As of 4:00pm

STATUS OF AFFECTED FACILITIES:

- All VA facilities impacted by the storm are now open and fully operational, EXCEPT the Manhattan VA Medical Center and the New York Regional Office (Manhattan), both of which remain temporarily closed.

VA New York Harbor Healthcare System – Manhattan Facility

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, VA New York Harbor Healthcare System's Manhattan facility remains temporarily closed. To accommodate Veterans' needs, several phone numbers and programs have been developed to ensure the continuity of care for patients currently displaced (Please see Health Related Information, Benefits Related Information, Shelter Information, and the Important Phone Numbers information below). The Brooklyn VA and St. Albans Community Living Center and Community Based Outpatient Clinics are all open and functioning normally.

The Manhattan facility, which is in the City's flood zone, was safely evacuated on October 28, prior to the storm. One hundred patients were transferred to neighboring VA facilities, including the Brooklyn, Bronx and Montrose facilities.

Located at 423 East 23rd Street, the Manhattan VA Medical Center sustained flood damage during the storm. The basement and ground floor were flooded, resulting in failure of electrical switches, mechanical systems, steam and the fire suppression system. Also destroyed was clinical equipment, including a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) used in outpatient clinic areas, located on the ground floor. VA officials continue to assess the damage and no timeline for repairs have been established. All employees have been relocated to the Brooklyn VA medical center, St. Albans Community Living Center, and other facilities located throughout the VA healthcare network.

“The damage at the Manhattan campus is extensive,” said Martina A. Parauda, Director of the medical center. “The building is structurally sound, but not safe for staff or patients. It will take some time for us to repair the electrical and mechanical systems, but we will be back.”

Veterans are currently being contacted by Centralized Scheduling to determine alternate VA medical center and community based outpatient clinic locations for their healthcare.

VA New York Regional Office – Manhattan Facility

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, VA's New York Regional Office remains closed. To accommodate Veterans' needs, several phone numbers and programs have been developed to ensure the continuity of care for displaced Veterans (Please see Health Related Information, Benefits Related Information, Shelter Information, and the Important Phone Numbers information below). Con Edison of New York (CONED) has informed the VA that due to priority work required in other areas of the Greenwich Village/SoHO area, CONED would be temporarily shutting off power to the Regional Office. There is currently no heat or electricity in the building. VA is receiving regular updates on the status of power to the facility. VA staff is working to transfer Veterans claims from the facility to other regional offices in the U.S.

HEALTH RELATED INFORMATION:

Emergency Pharmacy Refill Program

An Emergency Pharmacy Refill Program has been established to limit medication interruption for Veterans enrolled for VA care. The system can be accessed by going to any big chain pharmacy with your Veteran ID card and medication bottle with label (showing a refill date within the last 90 days). Ask the pharmacist to call Heritage Health Solutions Customer Care Center at toll free 1-866-265-0124, where a Customer Care Representative will qualify the request by asking a few questions. No controlled drugs will be processed under this program. If a controlled drug is needed, you must contact your local VA facility Emergency Department.

BENEFITS RELATED INFORMATION:

Home Loan Assistance:

Veterans who encounter difficulties paying their mortgage due to work stoppages or other disaster-related issues should contact VA's special loan assistance toll-free number, 877-827-3702. VBA's Loan Guaranty Service has pulled a list of habitable properties that could be made available in the areas affected by Hurricane Sandy and surrounding states. Assessors will be sent out to determine the level and magnitude of damage to VA-owned properties. At FEMA's request, Loan Guaranty Service will provide this list of habitable properties, which may be used as rentals. Loan Guaranty Service has also identified specially adapted housing grants in each affected state listed on FEMA's website. Loan Guaranty Service will have VA's Regional Loan Centers contact affected Veterans and issue guidance concerning special forbearance and foreclosure activity in affected areas. (See attachment "VA Guidance on Natural Disasters" for additional information).

VA compensation and pension benefits:

Veterans and family members experiencing difficulties receiving VA compensation and pension benefits due to the hurricane should contact VA by calling 1-800-827-1000. Individuals in receipt of VA benefits through EFT should continue to receive their payments without interruption. However, paper checks for VA compensation and pension benefits are issued by Treasury and delivered by the U.S. Postal Service. If Veterans and their family members need assistance because they will not receive their checks, they have the following options:

- Call VBA at 1-800-827-1000. Upon verification of the individual's identity, he or she can request a stop-payment on the previously issued check and either:
 - Schedule a one-time EFT to a bank account, or
 - Have a new check sent to the address of his or her choice. USPS is issuing updates on its operating status online (<http://about.usps.com/news/service-alerts/welcome.htm>). Several offices are not operating at this time. Taking into consideration updates on USPS' operating status, Veterans may request a new mailing address, such as a friend or family member's address.
- Go to a VA regional office and request a hardship payment. The regional office will make the payment and put a stop-payment on the previously issued check. Benefits received on the Comerica debit cards provided by the U.S. Treasury can be used at any bank, ATM, or retail location that is accepting debit or credit card transactions. The debit cards can be used to withdraw cash or make retail purchases and receive cash back. Please note that the New York Regional Office is currently closed due to the hurricane, and an opening date has not been determined at this time.

Education:

Schools affected by the hurricane should contact their VA Education Liaison Representative. VA education benefits may continue to be paid to students for up to four weeks of an enrollment period for which the school is closed as a result of an emergency. Veteran students who are affected by the disaster and have questions concerning their education benefits may call 1-888-GIBill1 for assistance.

Shelter Information:

Veterans who have been displaced from their homes are urged to call the VA's National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838) to speak to a trained VA responder.

The VA does not directly provide emergency shelter. Veterans needing shelter are referred to local resources that are offering this type of assistance.

Important VA Phone Numbers:

Below is a list of telephone numbers for Veterans to use for information on general health questions, appointments, and for medication refills.

- **For Medical Emergencies**, please dial 911.
- **VA Nurse Help Line:** 1-800-877-6976 to speak to a registered nurse if you experience any symptoms or have any health related questions.
- **Centralized Scheduling:**
 - For the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System, please call 1-877-877-9267 if you have questions about an appointment at the Manhattan VA or to schedule an appointment.
 - For the VA New Jersey Health Care System, please call 1-973-676-1000.
- **Veterans Crisis Line:** 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)
- **Mental Health Help Desk:** 1-718-630-3759
- **Pharmacy Call Center:**
 - VA New York/New Jersey Call Center 1-631-863-4832

Below is a list of telephone numbers for Veterans to use for information on benefits related questions.

- **Home Loan Assistance:** 877-827-3702
- **VA compensation and pension benefits:** 1-800-827-1000
- **Education:** 1-888-GIBill1

Below is a list of websites containing helpful information on status of facilities and general updates:

<http://www.va.gov/health/vamc/> - general link for all VHA facilities
<http://www.newjersey.va.gov/> - link for NJ VHA facilities
<http://www.nyharbor.va.gov/emergency/> - link to NYC VHA facilities
<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/8282/keeping-up-with-va-during-sandy/>