FACILITY OVERVIEW AND STATUS

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, is a complexity level 2 teaching hospital which provides a full range of patient care services. The medical center operates 58 hospital beds, 10 domiciliary beds, and 105 Community Living Center (CLC) beds. Comprehensive healthcare is provided through Primary Care, Medical and Surgical Specialty Care, and Mental Health Programming. Geriatrics and Extended Care services are also offered, including long term care, respite, rehabilitation, dementia care, hospice and palliative care, transitional care and a variety of home care services.

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center is part of the VA Healthcare - VISN 4 Network along with eight other medical centers in Altoona, Butler, Coatesville, Erie, Lebanon, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Wilmington.

SERVICE AREA


Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center
1111 East End Blvd.
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
570-824-3521 | 877-928-2621

Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic
3110 Hamilton Boulevard
Allentown, PA 18103
610-776-4304

Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
701 Slate Belt Boulevard
Bangor, PA 18013-9341
610-599-0127

Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
301 West Third Street
Berkwick, PA 18603
570-759-0351

Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic
1537 Elmira Street
Sayre, PA 18840
570-888-6803

Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic
Tobyhanna Army Depot
Building 220
Tobyhanna, PA 18466
570-615-8341

Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic
1705 Warren Avenue
3rd Floor • Suite 304
Williamsport, PA 17701
570-322-4791
### Total Employees

- **1,339** employees

### Employees by the Numbers:

- **Veterans:** 333
- **Nurses:** 225
- **Physicians:** 101

### Locations and Visits

- **Wilkes-Barre**
  - **35,926** unique veterans
  - **288,073** visits

- **Berwick**
  - **1,506** unique veterans
  - **3,925** visits

- **Williamsport**
  - **3,989** unique veterans
  - **15,667** visits

- **Tobyhanna & Sayre**
  - **589** unique veterans
  - **2,859** visits

- **Sayre**
  - **2,859** unique veterans
  - **17,516** visits

- **Honesdale**
  - **1,607** unique veterans
  - **3,170** visits

- **Allentown**
  - **9,358** unique veterans
  - **66,325** visits

- **Northampton**
  - **1,462** unique veterans
  - **4,485** visits

### Patient Total

- **38,968** unique patients

### Operating Beds

- **165** operating beds

### Total Outpatient Visits

- **397,418** visits

### Total Operating Budget

- **$262,761,091**

#### Breakdown of Budget

- **Medical Service:** $223,273,552
- **Facilities:** $16,842,830
- **Administrative:** $15,933,300
- **NRM:** $6,711,409
Expanding Home-based Primary Care

In 2016, Wilkes-Barre expands care options for Veterans living near the Williamsport CBOC

VA's Home Based Primary Care (HBPC) program provides health care services to Veterans in their homes. A VA physician supervises the health care team providing services for Veterans with complex health care needs for whom routine clinic-based care is not effective.

For more than a decade, Wilkes-Barre has delivered HBPC to Veterans with complex medical issues, and to homebound Veterans with chronic illnesses. The program's interdisciplinary approach to care and its patient-centered focus keeps many Veterans out of the hospital and out of nursing homes, and allows them to continue to live in their own homes with their loved ones. Since HBPC's beginnings, Veterans enrolled in the program consistently report high levels of satisfaction with their care.

In 2016, the program's availability expanded for Veterans in Wilkes-Barre's catchment area. It is now available to Veterans who use our Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) and will be available to Veterans who use the Sayre CBOC in 2017.

New Call Center Established

Medication refills, appointment scheduling among services now provided Wilkes-Barre Veterans by phone

Veterans who call either 1-877-928-2621 (extension 2) or 570-824-3521 (extension 2) between the hours of 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday are now connected to Wilkes-Barre's fully functioning centralized call center. The call center, which replaced the central scheduling unit in 2016, provides a functional bridge between Veterans and their health care teams.

Staff at the call center can help Veterans with scheduling and canceling appointments, processing medication refills and redirecting their calls to the proper destination. They also enter administrative notes within Veterans' medical records, and relay care-related messages to Patient Aligned Care Teams.

The new call center is another process change that has improved the Veteran experience at Wilkes-Barre.

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THANK YOU VETERANS | 2016 ANNUAL REPORT
Consistent Staffing Comes to the CLC

Scheduling assignments improve residents’ care, staff morale

At VA’s Community Living Centers (CLCs), Veterans receive nursing home levels of care, including help with activities such as bathing and getting dressed, and skilled nursing and medical care. The mission of the CLC program is to restore each Veteran to his or her highest level of well-being.

Wilkes-Barre’s 105-bed CLC offers area Veterans short and long-term care services and specialty services including hospice, palliative care, dementia care, rehabilitation services and transitional care. In 2016, the CLC implemented a new way to improve the health care outcomes of Veterans in the center, and to retain the center’s dedicated staff.

Called Consistent Staffing, the program involves consistently assigning the same caregivers to the same shifts and neighborhoods every day, fostering trust-based relationships. Trust-based relationships improve communication between residents and staff, and allows caregivers to quickly recognize any developing care issues with the Veteran.

Studies have shown consistent staffing programs also reduce caregiver absence and help generate a team environment.

To implement the program at Wilkes-Barre, each floor of the CLC was divided into neighborhoods, and staff members helped develop a schedule allowing for consistent assignments within each neighborhood, and within each shift. While all CLC residents benefit from the new program, those living on the dementia unit are especially helped, according to the CLC’s resident council.

Having the same staff work with dementia patents on a daily basis results in stronger communications, more consistent interactions between staff and residents, and a better understanding of the individual personalities of each resident. This allows for more effective interventions that reduce behavioral incidents, and improves patient outcomes.

Consistent staffing not only improves the Veteran experience on the CLC, it also improves staff morale. As a best practice, it’s a win-win!

Wilkes-Barre VA CLC resident Rich Rietkerk (left) decorates the Christmas tree with Frank Ferris, a consistent staff member in the CLC. Consistent staffing has encouraged relationships among staff and residents.

Wilkes-Barre VA CLC resident Rich Rietkerk (left) decorates the Christmas tree with Frank Ferris, a consistent staff member in the CLC. Consistent staffing has encouraged relationships among staff and residents.
Have Health Care, Will Travel

VA’s Traveling Veteran Program makes it easy for Veterans to get world-class care, even far from home.

These days, Americans frequently travel for extended periods of time, for work, for pleasure, or for any number of other reasons. VA commits to all enrolled Veterans who receive their health care from the department that they will receive the same consistent level of care, either at their local VA health care facility or at an alternate VA facility.

VA’s Traveling Veteran program, launched at Wilkes-Barre in 2015, ensures traveling Veterans have uninterrupted access to care wherever they are.

Veterans who know they will be traveling are asked to tell their health care provider where and when they will be going, and any specific care concerns they may have. The provider then collaborates with the facility’s Traveling Veteran Program Coordinator (TVC) to ensure any pending clinical orders, such as blood work, are performed at a location near the Veteran’s travel destination.

Ann Kwiatkowski is Wilkes-Barre’s TVC. She has served more than a hundred Veterans since the program began. She and other TVC’s throughout the nation answer care coordination questions, coordinate appointments, and help Veterans navigate activities at unfamiliar locations. They work with coordinators to ensure the seamless management and delivery of medically necessary care for traveling Veterans.

A recent survey of Veterans using the program resulted in overwhelmingly positive comments about the convenience of having a single point of contact in the TVC, and about the care they received while traveling. Those who participated in Wilkes-Barre said the program also offered them the peace of mind that their needs will be met and their care will be seamlessly coordinated.

Although the Traveling Veteran Program addresses a very specific group of Veterans, the program is very helpful in increasing access to care for those Veterans, and improving Veterans’ experience with VA health care.
Helping Hands for Healthy Hearts

Wilkes-Barre’s new cardiac catheterization suite offers state-of-the-art care close to home

Cardiac catheterization is a procedure that examines how well the heart is working. A thin, hollow tube called a catheter is inserted into a large blood vessel leading to the heart. The results of the procedure tell doctors if patients have diseases of the heart muscle, valves or coronary arteries.

Wilkes-Barre’s team of cardiologists, nurses, and technologists is skilled in all aspects of catheterization care. They understand procedures involving the heart can be particularly stressful, and do all they can to address and alleviate Veterans’ concerns.

At the medical center, cardiac catheterizations are performed in a state-of-the-art suite. The suite is equipped with the latest technology, including biplane imaging (which allows doctors to follow the path of blood through blood vessels and create a roadmap for reaching and treating the precise location of problems) and three-dimensional mapping.

Richard Weaver, Registered Cardiac Invasive Specialist (front) and Dr. Izzat Shah, M.D. (back), provide Veterans advanced cardiac catheterization care at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center.

In cardiac catheterization, the catheter can be inserted into either the radial artery in the wrist or the femoral artery in the groin area. The vast majority of catheterization procedures done at Wilkes-Barre today are radial catheterizations, in which a flexible catheter is inserted into the wrist.

Benefits of the radial process, compared to femoral catheterizations, include a reduced risk of bleeding, getting people on their feet more quickly, and increased comfort. Veterans who undergo radial catheterizations are usually done two hours after the procedure is completed. In Wilkes-Barre, they spend the two hours in the Catheterization lab recovery room, relaxing in heated massage recliners!

Every year, the cardiac catheterization team treats more and more Wilkes-Barre-area Veterans, so patients no longer need to travel to VA medical centers in Philadelphia and New York for care. This means that they no longer have to face invasive procedures in unfamiliar settings, without loved ones by their side.

The cardiac catheterization team, and the new lab, is another demonstration of how Wilkes-Barre improves the Veteran experience by using the latest medical technology to produce the best possible outcome for Veterans.
Nurses on the Front Lines of Health Care

Nursing service innovations significantly improve Veterans’ satisfaction with their care

The late nurse and social worker Lillian D. Wald once said, “Nursing is love in action,” and Wilkes-Barre’s nursing staff exemplifies that sentiment. At the medical center and at the outpatient clinics, Nursing Service continually looks for opportunities to improve the health care and services Veterans receive.

Nursing Service champions Lean Six Sigma, a process improvement technique to improve products and services by removing waste and increasing process effectiveness. In health care facilities, the technique lowers cost, generates savings, and improves patient outcomes through improved efficiency and waste reduction.

In 2016, the service focused on staff engagement as a way to increase Veterans’ satisfaction with their care. They began by distributing “welcome” and “thank you” cards to all Wilkes-Barre inpatients. These cards are distributed on admission and discharge, along with a request to Veterans and their family members to rate and comment on the care they received.

To keep Veterans informed, communication boards have been implemented in the inpatient rooms. The boards provide the Veteran with real time information related to the care and services being provided.

All of the feedback provided in the cards is reviewed, and follow-up is provided upon request. The cards give Veterans a way to comment on the care they received, and provide the service with both positive and negative feedback. They allow Veterans themselves to help their fellow patients get the best possible care.

Also in 2016, the service placed communication boards in all inpatient units. These boards provide Veterans with real time information about their care, and with the name and contact information for the nurse assigned to their care, should the need arise.

Nursing Service also helped make changes to Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) processes relating to the separation of Wilkes-Barre’s primary care and specialty care clinics. These changes enhanced access to care for Veterans, and made delivery of care more efficient.

Finally, Nursing Service helped increase the use of tele-primary care at Wilkes-Barre. Tele-primary care allows Veterans to visit one of the facility’s outpatient clinics and receive a complete primary care visit with a clinician located at the medical center. In 2016, this service became available at the Allentown CBOC. In 2017, it will become available at all of Wilkes-Barre’s CBOCs.
SARRTP Throws a Picnic

Wilkes-Barre Veterans overcoming addiction issues meet to celebrate their sobriety

Wilkes-Barre’s Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Treatment Program (SARRTP) provides high-quality individualized residential rehabilitation treatment services to Veterans struggling with substance abuse related disorders. The SARRTP team, an interdisciplinary team of specialists, helps Veterans and their families identify, address and overcome addiction issues.

In September 2016, SARRTP team members hosted their first annual reunion—a catered event in the Picnic Pavilion on the Wilkes-Barre campus. Approximately 40 Veterans attended. The guest speaker was a former program participant, and other attendees were given the chance to discuss the program and their recovery process.

“I am so grateful for this opportunity to bond with fellow Veterans,” said one. “This is bringing me back to the importance of the fellowship,” explained another.

Those invited had participated in the program within the past year, and maintained their sobriety. The reunion was a tool to help Veterans who had completed the program build a sober recovery system. As one Veteran said, “it reminds me of the importance of using my fellow Veterans and VA for support.”

In addition to acknowledging and celebrating the accomplishment of sobriety, the event also reinforced the common fellowship and comradery all Veterans have. All in attendance enjoyed the event, and felt it was a great way to celebrate success in their battles with addiction.

Allegiance to the Flag

New flagpole erected at CLC to commemorate Veterans’ service

No icon better symbolizes the sacrifices of all who have served and defended our nation, or represents the rights and freedoms all Americans enjoy, than the flag of the United States. Veterans take particular pride in following proper flag etiquette, and in continuing traditions and ceremonies they learned while in uniform designed to honor the flag and all it represents.

Unfortunately, many Veterans living in Wilkes-Barre’s Community Living Center (CLC) were unable to visit the flag on a regular basis at its current location.

At the request of a CLC Resident, the medical center’s Grounds and Maintenance staff volunteered to take the lead on constructing a new flagpole. The team designed the retaining walls, purchased the materials and performed all construction themselves. They worked with Recreation Therapy staff and CLC residents to create a new landscaping plan around the pole that incorporated patriotic colors.

On June 14, 2016, Flag Day, the new flagpole was dedicated to all CLC residents. The dedication ceremony involved many current residents, who led the Pledge of Allegiance, sang patriotic songs, and read a poem about “Old Glory.” The ceremony reminded all in attendance about the service and sacrifices of Veterans, and the reason VA exists as an organization to serve them.
New Women Veterans Clinic Opens

Clinic, opened in October, provides a safer and more comfortable environment of care.

Women are the fastest growing group within the Veteran population, and serve at all levels in the military, from front-line combat to leadership roles. Those who are Veterans are signing up for VA health care and benefits at higher rates than ever.

Since its opening in 1949, Wilkes-Barre has dedicated itself to providing the highest possible level of care to women Veterans. Just as the roles of women in the military have evolved since then, so has the need to provide them with high-quality routine and specialized care. VHA leads the nation in the diagnosis and treatment of many medical conditions unique to women Veterans.

In 2016, Wilkes-Barre constructed a new Women’s Health Clinic, one of its patient-centered care initiatives for the year. Although women’s health services were already offered within the Medical Center’s primary care clinic, the space allocated for women did not meet all of VA’s standards for women Veterans’ care.

The new clinic eliminates barriers to women Veterans’ access to specialized health care services, and to their ability to use those services. It addresses those concerns by integrating care, promoting gender sensitivity, and providing a safe and comfortable environment in which women Veterans’ care is provided.

The clinic, which opened Oct. 31, includes 3 exam rooms, an OB/GYN procedure room, and a Mental Health/Pharmaceutical Consultation room. Each room has a private bathroom for enhanced comfort. The waiting room includes a dedicated children’s activity area.

The new clinic was constructed by Wilkes-Barre employees, 80 percent of whom are Veterans themselves, as a locally planned and funded projects. It was a labor of love, recognizing the sacrifices and important contributions to our nation woman Veterans have made and are making.
The Last Full Measure of Devotion

Honors escort program allows family, friends, and staff to pay their final respects to Veterans who have gone to their final reward

Wilkes-Barre has joined VA medical centers throughout the nation in launching a new program, called Honors Escort. The program offers a ceremonial escort to patients who pass away while at the Medical Center or Community Living Center (CLC).

The ceremony allows staff, residents, patients, and visitors to pay their final respects to the Veteran, and reminds family members of the high regard and reverence VA holds for their loved one, even after they have passed on. The ceremony is conducted by trained volunteer employees, and ensures that Veterans’ service, accomplishments, and sacrifices are not forgotten as they are laid to rest.

The first Honors Escort at Wilkes-Barre took place on June 16, 2016, and more than 25 such ceremonies have taken place since. The ceremony begins with a bedside flag ceremony. Afterward, the Veteran’s gurney is draped with the American flag, and a procession escorts the Veteran to the morgue. As the procession moves through the medical center, all who are standing along the procession route stand aside and quietly offer their respects.

According to Valerie Barna, LCSW, the palliative care coordinator for the medical center, “When you see employees, Veterans, and visitors lining the hall to pay their respect as the procession goes by, it’s very moving.”

Throughout the ceremony, a team member remains with the family of the deceased, providing comfort and support. Once the ceremony is completed, the team member remains with the family to ensure all necessary issues are addressed, and all of their questions or concerns are answered. The team member then escorts the family to their vehicle or vehicles.

Veterans are appreciative of the program. “I have had many CLC residents tell me that the honors escort allows them to have closure. They also feel it provides respect to the Veteran who has passed,” says Hope Danishanko, LSW, a social worker at the CLC.

Concludes Barna, “It couldn’t be done without our employee volunteers. They are touching so many people with their kindness.”

The processions provides fellow residents a moment of closure and the bidding of a dignified farewell to a fallen brother in arms.