



The Guardian

The Newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services

www.nmdvs.org

1-(866) 433-8387 toll-free

September, 2020

DVS Continues Telework Operations



The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) will continue to conduct business and offer public assistance by mail, telephone, email, or video conferencing. DVS, as with all state agencies, will be offering this telework remote assistance until the New Mexico Department of Health deems it safe for state offices to reopen to the public.

Veterans and unmarried surviving spouses of deceased veterans needing help with filing for or updating their VA or state veterans benefits can contact any DVS Veterans Service Officer (VSO) listed below on the VSO's mobile phone, leaving messages on the VSO's office phone, real-time video conferencing, or e-mail. Assistance is provided on a first-call, first-served basis. "Real time" video conferencing can also be arranged by contacting the VSO.

Data from the state Department of Health data shows the COVID-19 continues to spread throughout New Mexico (*more New Mexico COVID-19 data on page 3*)—and in neighboring Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Oklahoma, Texas, and northern Mexico.

Alamogordo (VSO: Larry Weatherwax)

Office: (575) 437-4635

Mobile: (575) 491-3127

larry.weatherwax@state.nm.us

Carlsbad (Dagmar Youngberg)

Office: (575) 885-4939

Mobile: (575) 988-5900

Dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us

Albuquerque #1 (Karen Abeyta)

Office: (505) 346-3986

Mobile: (505) 429-0856

karen.abeyta@state.nm.us

Clovis (Matt Barela)

Office: (575) 762-6185

Mobile: (575) 825-9602

Matthew.barela@state.nm.us

Albuquerque #2 (Gordon Schei)

Office: (505) 346-4810

Mobile: (same as office number)

Gordon.schei@state.nm.us

Farmington (Beverly Charley)

Office: (505) 327-2861

Mobile: (same as office number)

Beverly.charley@state.nm.us

Albuquerque #3 (Victoria Bader)

Mobile: (505) 225-5253

Victoria.bader@state.nm.us

Gallup (Durrell Tsosie)

Mobile: (505) 218-0348

Durrell.Tsosie@state.nm.us

Albuquerque #4 (Johnny Martinez)

Mobile: (505) 274-3609

johnW.martinez2@state.nm.us

(Hobbs (Dalton Boyd)

Office: (575) 397-5290

Mobile: (575) 241-0714

Dalton.boyd2@state.nm.us

Las Cruces #1 (George Vargas)

Office: (575) 524-6124
 Mobile: (5785) 520-2634

George.vargas@state.nm.us

Roswell (Danielle Thompson)

Office: (575) 624-6086
 Mobile: (575) 416-2284

Danielle.thompson@state.nm.us

Las Cruces #2 (Rosa Bycenski)

Office: (575) 524-6220
 Mobile: (505) 870-1349

Rosa.bycenski@state.nm.us

Santa Fe (Dustin Newsom)

Mobile: (505) 221-7190

Dustin.newsom@state.nm.us

Las Cruces #3 (Craig Chumley)

Office: (575) 524-6220
 Mobile: (same as office number)

Craig.chumley@state.nm.us

Las Vegas, NM #1 (Martín Márquez)

Office: (505) 454-0068
 Mobile: (575) 520-5079

MartinM.marquez@state.nm.us

Las Vegas, NM #2 (Arturo Marlow)

Mobile: (505) 331-8838

Arturo.marlow@state.nm.us

For VA benefits, veterans can get more information or self-file online at www.ebenefits.va.gov

Help for Veteran-Owned Businesses

Veterans who own their own business can contact the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) for information about emergency assistance programs for small businesses affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Rich Coffel
VBOC Director

(505) 383-2401

RichardL.coffel@state.nm.us

Jim Cassidy (*based in SE/southern NM*)

VBOC Veterans Business Advisor

(575) 624-6002

JamesM.cassidy@state.nm.us

Ft. Stanton, Gallup, and Angel Fire State Veterans Cemeteries; Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Full funerals and the rendering of military funeral honors are still downsized until further notice at the DVS-managed Ft. Stanton, Gallup, and Angel Fire State Veterans Cemeteries. Gatherings will continue to be limited to ten individuals, per National Cemetery Association regulations. Attendees are required to wear masks, and observe six-foot social distancing spacing. Burials and interments are performed by DVS staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). Once full post-pandemic operations resume, families can schedule full-service interments by contacting the following DVS cemetery supervisors:

Ft. Stanton

Gilbert Lopez
 (505) 383-4381

david.flores@state.nm.us

Gallup State

David Flores
 (575) 921-3494

gilbert.lopez@state.nm.us

Angel Fire

Randy Myklebust
 (505) 225-4342

randal.myklebust@state.nm.us

The Memorial Chapel at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire remains open to the public. Masks are required, and social distancing spacing will be monitored by PPE-wearing DVS staff. However, the remainder of the Memorial grounds remains closed to the public.

Latest COVID-19 Statistics for New Mexico (as of Sep. 2)

County	Major City/Town	Cases	Aug. 1	Deaths
Bernalillo	Albuquerque	5,861	(+832)	159
McKinley	Gallup	4,223	(+184)	243
San Juan	Farmington	3,199	(+173)	192
Dona Ana	Las Cruces	2,892	(+544)	44
Sandoval	Rio Rancho	1,255	(+138)	37
Lea	Hobbs	1,151	(+432)	15
Santa Fe	Santa Fe	828	(+210)	4
Chaves	Roswell	754	(+343)	6
Curry	Clovis	680	(+164)	5
Valencia	Los Lunas	515	(+116)	4
Eddy	Carlsbad	513	(+272)	5
Cibola	Grants	398	(+52)	20
Rio Arriba	Española	359	(+47)	13
Luna	Deming	316	(+75)	5
Otero	Alamogordo	224	(+27)	12
Roosevelt	Portales	204	(+47)	2
Lincoln	Ruidoso	171	(+54)	2
Taos	Taos	116	(+10)	3
Hidalgo	Lordsburg	98	(+9)	2
Grant	Silver City	84	(+13)	2
San Miguel	Las Vegas	83	(+41)	0
Socorro	Socorro	78	(+5)	6
Torrance	Moriarty	63	(+2)	1
Quay	Tucumcari	62	(+28)	2
Sierra	T or C	38	(+7)	1
Guadalupe	Santa Rosa	32	(+1)	1
Union	Clayton	31	(+3)	2
Los Alamos	Los Alamos	27	(+7)	0
Colfax	Raton	20	(+4)	1
Catron	Quemado	8	(+3)	1
Mora	Mora	6	0	0
Harding	Mosquero	2	(+1)	0
De Baca	Ft. Sumner	0	0	0
Counties Total		24,291	(+3,803)	790

Correctional Facilities		Cases	Deaths
(+121)			
County	(Privately Managed) [Contracted w/ICE]		
Cibola	(Cibola County Correctional Center)	324	
Otero	(Otero County Prison Facility)	281	[1]
Otero	[Otero County Processing Center]	159	
Torrance	(Torrance County Detention Facility)	44	
State/County Facilities			
Cibola	NW New Mexico Correctional Center	1	
Cibola	Western NM Correctional Facility	4	
Otero	Otero County Prison Facility	473	[3]
Lea	Lea County Correctional Facility	4	
Santa Fe	State Penitentiary of New Mexico	1	
Union	NE New Mexico Correctional Facility	1	
Valencia	Central NM Correctional Facility	29	
[Prison/Jail Inmate Total]		[1,321]	[4]
TOTAL IN NM		25,612	790

		<u>Aug. 1</u>
Number of New Mexicans Tested:	770,959	(+180,133)
Deaths	790	(+121)
<i>Hospitalized (currently)</i>	<i>71</i>	
Hospitalized (to date)	3,159	(+406)
Recovered	13,180	(+4,496)

Deaths (by Age Group)	
<19	0
20's	7
30's	42
40's	39
50's	100
60's	133
70's	176
80's	188
90's	99
100's	6
Total	790

HAVE A COVID-SAFE LABOR DAY

Stay safe, save lives.



1

CELEBRATE WITH YOUR HOUSEHOLD ONLY



2

KEEP IT OUTSIDE



3

KEEP HANDS CLEAN



4

PLACE GARBAGE BINS OUTSIDE



5

BRING YOUR OWN FOOD



6

STAY 6 FEET APART



7

WEAR A MASK

SBA Regional Administrator Visits the DVS VBOC

U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Regional Administrator Justin Crossi visited Albuquerque on August 28 to meet with New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) Director Rich Coffel and the owners of a local security business.

The VBOC is the veterans business development division of DVS. It is funded by an SBA grant to help entrepreneurial-minded veterans with starting or expanding a small business.

Mr. Crossi met with VBOC Director Coffel and the three owners of 3D Security Services Group, an Albuquerque veteran-owned business that provides a full range of security-related services.

He wanted feedback on how the SBA's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) affected veteran-owned small businesses here in New Mexico.

PPP is a loan program designed to provide an incentive for small businesses to keep their workers on the payroll during the COVID-19 pandemic. These loans will be forgiven if all employee retention criteria are met, and the funds are used for eligible expenses. The owners of 3D told Mr. Crossi that the program "is a life-saver."

"Without the PPP loan, we would have had to close our business," said Chris Sweetin to Mr. Crossi. "We did have to furlough some employees, but we were able to bring most of them back."

Also discussed was what the 3D owners would like to see if PPP loans are revived. The program ended August 8. The 3D owners said they would like to see a lowering of the mandatory 60% amount the original program required to be set aside for employee payroll. The 3D owners said this does not allow for marketing and business expansion. Mr. Crossi thanked everyone for meeting with him and said he will present this and all other feedback to the national SBA office.



FROM L to R: 3D Security Services Group owners John Hughes, Chris Sweetin, Jennifer Sweetin...SBA Regional Administrator Justin Crossi, and VBOC Director Rich Coffel.

The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the New Mexico's Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) is offering assistance via email, phone, or video conferencing. It can help veterans or their spouses with everything from business planning, start-up and expansion funding, marketing, and anything else a small business needs to launch and grow.

Please contact VBOC Director Rich Coffel at (505) 220-9932 or richardL.coffel@state.nm.us.

VBOC Veterans Business Advisor James Cassidy can provide assistance in southern and southeastern New Mexico from the VBOC field office in Roswell. He can be contacted at jamesM.cassidy@state.nm.us or (575) 228-3024.

DVS Participates in Town Hall Meeting Hosted by Congressman Ben Ray Lujan



DVS Field Services Director Larry Campos ([above photo-bottom/center](#)) and DVS Albuquerque VSO Karen Abeyta ([lower-right corner](#)) participated in a town hall meeting hosted by Congressman Ben Ray Lujan (D-New Mexico)([center](#)) on August 28 for an update on the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act*.

The law was co-sponsored by Congressman Lujan, who also serves as the House Assistant Speaker.

The law, which went into effect on January 1, 2019, extends the presumption of service-connection for certain diseases associated with Agent Orange to veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam—making it much easier for them to get their benefits and treating them the same as other Vietnam War veterans.

“During this pandemic, and always, it’s crucial that veterans across New Mexico are supported. I was proud to join local veterans and leaders from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services to provide an update on the Blue Water Vietnam Veterans Act. This new law that I was proud to support better serves veterans impacted by Agent Orange,” said Congressman Ben Ray Luján. “America owes our veterans a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid, but we must do our best to make sure veterans are treated with the respect and dignity they have earned.”

Congressman Luján is also a co-sponsor of the Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act, which would add four new illnesses to the list of conditions that are presumed to be service-connected. Additionally, Congressman Luján was a co-sponsor of the CARES Act, which included nearly \$20 billion to continue serving veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic, including more than \$14 billion to bolster the Department of Veterans Affairs COVID-19 response.

DVS Honors Purple Heart Recipients in a Private *Purple Heart Day* Ceremony



DVS and Rivera Family Funerals & Cremations of Santa Fe commemorated national Purple Heart Day in a brief but solemn ceremony in Santa Fe on August 7.

Standing in front of the Eternal Flame Monument at the Bataan Memorial Building, DVS Secretary Judy Griego was joined by Rivera Family Funerals & Cremations of Santa Fe Ambassador Gilbert Martinez to honor our nation's Purple Heart Award recipients.

DVS Cemetery Division Manager David Walker, DVS Cemetery Program Assistant Deanna Anaya,

and DVS State Benefits Division Bureau Chief Jeff George were also on hand for the ceremony, which was closed to the public.

The Purple Heart award is our nation's oldest combat award--presented on behalf of the President of the United States to U.S. service members wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy. It is also awarded posthumously to the next-of-kin of service members killed in combat or die of wounds suffered in combat.



"The COVID-19 pandemic dictates that we are not celebrating in typical fashion. With the interest of the safety of the public, we are commemorating the day in this private gathering—because we do not want to let the day go by without somehow honoring our Purple Heart recipients," said DVS Secretary Griego.

She added, "While we are grateful for the service of all men and women who have served our country, we are especially grateful for the sacrifice of our nation's Purple Heart recipients...who have literally "taken a bullet" for our country...in the name of serving us. I am proud and honored to be here today at this ceremony to honor our Purple Heart recipients. I humbly thank them for their service and sacrifice."

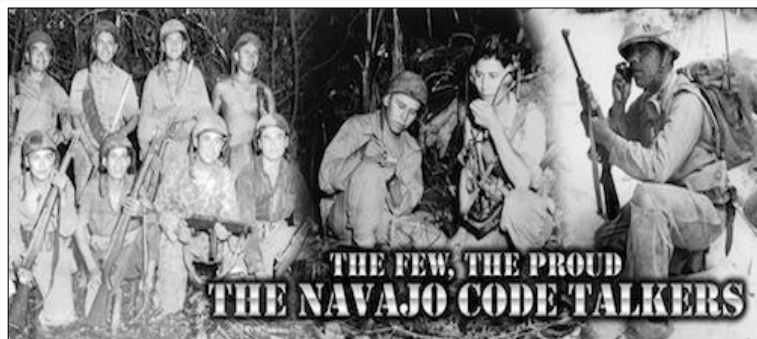
Secretary Griego's five-minute remarks can be viewed on the DVS YouTube Channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z--3T_g3J0A



DVS Secretary Griego Honors Code Talkers in “Virtual” Navajo Code Talkers Day Event

DVS Secretary Judy Griego was among several guest speakers taking part in a National Navajo Code Talkers Day virtual celebration presented by the Navajo Nation Council on August 14.

Secretary Griego thanked the more than 400 men from the Navajo Nation who joined or enlisted with the U.S. Marine Corps. The men were tasked with developing a communication code based on their obscure native language which the Marines hoped would confound Japanese code breakers.



The code developed by these “Code Talkers” was never able to be deciphered—paving the way for the Marines and the U.S. Navy to carry out tactics which lead to Japan’s surrender on September 2, 1945.

“The Navajo Code Talkers played a key role in ensuring the end of this devastating war. And for this, we will always be grateful,” said Secretary Griego in her videotaped message. “On behalf of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, our veterans, the citizens of New Mexico, I want to thank you for your service and your sacrifice. This will never be forgotten.”

Only four Code Talkers are alive today: Samuel F. Sandoval of Shiprock, Thomas H. Begay of Albuquerque. Peter MacDonald, Sr., of Tuba City, AZ, and John Kinsel, Sr., of Lukachukai, AZ.

Volunteer Veterans Install *Honor Bell* at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire



Over the August 14-17 weekend, members of the Marines Motorcycle Club of Northern New Mexico volunteered their time to install a *Freedom Bell* at the DVS-managed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.

The group raised more than \$5,000 to design the bell—with approval by DVS. The group then purchased the bell, prepared the ground, poured cement, laid surrounding bricks, installed the bell and commemorative plaque, and applied a “finish” coat. The group donated the bell for use at ceremonies at the Memorial.

The plaque, which is surrounded by emblems representing our nation’s five military service branches, reads “*This Honor Bell is presented to the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services Vietnam Veterans Memorial, with respect for the David Westphall Veterans Foundation, on behalf of*

the Marines Motorcycle Club, 2020. Our comrades may be gone, but they shall never be forgotten. Semper Fidelis!

The Chaves County Health Council with Western Sky Community Care presents



CONNECTING COMMUNITY WITH HEALTHY RESOURCES



September 12, 2020 via FACEBOOK



Join us for video presentations throughout the day from community partners--including the NM Dept. of Veterans Services--with info to help manage your health and wellness needs.



Follow our event on Facebook at Chaves County Health Council



Twitter and Instagram @CCHEALTHCOUNCIL





Members of the Las Cruces Fire Department and Veterans await the arrival of the Gold Star Families Monument.

Thanks to Mike Cano and Hubert Gay Las Cruces Veterans Park has two new monuments. They were installed within 9 weeks of each other by teams from Budagers Crane Co. and Worthen Memorials of Albuquerque.



Wall of Fame

The Wall of Fame recognizes some of the Las Cruces Veteran's and Community members who have made contributions to the Veterans living within the community.

Gold Star Families

The Gold Star Families Monument pays tribute to those families who have lost loved ones in the service of their country while in combat.





GOLD STAR LUMINARIA INITIATIVE

On **Gold Star Mother's Day**, we come together to honor those who have lost a loved one serving in the U.S. Military by lighting luminarias on the last Sunday in September.

**YOUR DONATION PROVIDES
GOLD STAR MOTHERS THE MEANS
TO HELP MORE VETERANS**

**YOUR LUMINARIA KITS WILL CONTAIN:
10 LUMINARIAS, 10 CANDLES
AND LIGHTING INSTRUCTIONS**

**CHOOSE HOW MANY
LUMINARIAS YOU WANT**

FREE SHIPPING OUTSIDE ALBUQUERQUE & RIO RANCHO

**1 LUMINARIA KIT \$50
2 LUMINARIA KITS \$95
3 LUMINARIA KITS \$135
4+ LUMINARIA KITS \$42.50 EACH**



**MAKING A
DIFFERENCE WITH**

T.H.O.R.E
THE ♥ OF REAL ESTATE

CONTACTS:

JOYCE PAULSEN (GOLD STAR MOTHER) 505-980-8787

GERAD GARCIA (T.H.O.R.E) 505-205-5536

www.gsmnm.org (donate button)

Veterans matter in the 2020 Census.

Already completed your census? Great!

TELL YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS,
AND FELLOW VETERANS TO GET COUNTED!

New Mexico is at risk of an undercount. That means people you know still haven't been counted. It's their constitutional right and their response will help New Mexico. Please take a minute to remind them to complete their census.



GET COUNTED TODAY AT:
2020census.gov or call (844) 330-2020



i COUNT NM
i count because i care

United States®
Census
2020

VA's "Be There" Campaign to Kick Off Veterans Suicide Prevention Month in September



**VA Secretary
Robert Wilkie**

**For more news and
benefits information
from the VA, visit
www.va.gov**

**The VA has a regional
office in Albuquerque.
For more Information:
[www.benefits.va.gov/
albuquerque](http://www.benefits.va.gov/albuquerque)**

**For information about the
New Mexico VA
Health Care System:
www.albuquerque.va.gov**

This September, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recognizes Suicide Prevention Month highlighting the VA's *Be There* campaign, reminding veterans and their loved ones that small actions can make a big difference to veterans going through difficult times.

During this and every month, the *Be There* campaign calls for veterans, community leaders and veterans' families and friends to know there is no special training needed to give a veteran hope.

"There are simple ways anyone can show support for our nation's veterans --like learning about VA suicide prevention efforts, and recognizing the signs that a veteran may need help," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Take a moment to listen with compassion and let veterans know you're there for them."

The *Be There* campaign suggests several simple actions that can help make a difference for a Veteran to include:

—Reaching out to Veterans by sending a check-in text, cooking them dinner or simply asking them how they're doing.

—Learning about the warning signs of suicide found on the Veterans Crisis Line website: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/education/signs-of-crisis>

—Watching the free S.A.V.E. training video: <https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/> to learn how to respond with care and compassion if someone indicates they are having thoughts of suicide.

—Contacting VA's Coaching Into Care program: <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching/> where a licensed psychologist or social worker will provide loved ones with guidance for motivating Veterans to seek support.

—Sharing stories of hope and recovery from VA's Make the Connection link: <https://www.maketheconnection.net/>

—For more information and resources regarding the *Be There* campaign: [https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/support/be-there?
utm_source=bethereforveterans.com](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/support/be-there?utm_source=bethereforveterans.com)

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Call **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**, text to 838255, or chat online at: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat>

VA Decreases Mail Processing Time For Claims Intakes

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has improved procedures by incorporating an artificial intelligence (AI) solution to reduce the time it takes to process in-coming mail from 10 days to just one day.

The software reads the mail document contents and automatically routes it to the VA employees working the next step of the claims process; which means faster processing of the information veterans send to VBA in support of their claims.

“Moving past manual mail processes to automation puts the emphasis on veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This new capability allows the VA to process veterans’ claims quickly and efficiently.”

On average, the VBA receives more than 550,000 pieces of mail per month related to benefits and services. The volume of mail comes from submissions by veterans, surviving spouses, service agencies, attorneys and claims agents. This mail is often the starting point to initiate a claim or provide supportive documentation for potential benefits and services they may be eligible for; in addition to general inquires. Visit <https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/> or more program information.

VA Now Offering Artificial Assistance to Speed Up Connecting With Certain Services

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today a new artificial intelligence platform designed to enhance customer service and provide timely responses to veterans.

The electronic Virtual Assistant (e-VA) allows veterans to receive a timely response to basic questions, automated alerts, follow-up messages, appointment reminders and the ability to schedule and reschedule appointments.

“For our veterans, e-VA means communicating with more flexibility and convenience and the ability to connect with our counselors and staff via text and email,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “For the VA, e-VA connects with our veterans, efficiently handles administrative functions, works with our case management system and also provides management with additional reporting tools.”

The Veterans Benefits Administration’s (VBA) Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Service released e-VA in a staggered approach to four VBA districts — Southeast, Pacific, Continental and Northeast — with the completion of the national deployment Aug. 11.

The platform provides modern, streamlined and responsive customer service support to VR&E veterans, as well as automates routine administrative activities for VR&E Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and staff. Participants will be allowed to submit documentation from a smartphone, tablet or computer. Additionally, all correspondence through e-VA will be included in the Veteran’s electronic file.

Veterans receiving VR&E services will receive a text message or an email introducing e-VA as VR&E’s new electronic Virtual Assistant. Veterans must opt-in to start using the service. Upon opt-in acceptance e-VA will be available immediately.

"Annie" App for Veterans



Annie is VA's automated text messaging app developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that you can use with either a basic cell or smartphone; you just need a data plan. The program helps you take a more active role in your health care.

Annie is a computer system that sends you personalized text messages to remind you to complete health tasks. Annie helps you take a more active role in your health care by reminding you to complete steps to maintain your health.

How To Set Up Annie

Follow these steps to get started.



Step 1: Go to the website.
veteran.mobile.va.gov/annie-vet



Step 2: Log in.
Log in using your My Health eVet Premium, DS Logon Level 2, or ID.me account. Find out how to get a secure login account at mobile.va.gov/login-information.



Step 3: Consent to participate.
Read the consent information. Scroll to the end and select the consent box.



Step 4: Set up your Annie account.
Complete the fields under the **Information Messages, Preferences, and Patient Info** tabs. Select **Submit**, which will take you to a screen saying your registration was a success.



Step 5: Confirm participation.
You will receive a message from Annie asking you to confirm your participation. Reply to the message with the word **Start**.

If you have any questions please contact Brenda C. Titcomb at 505-265-1711 ext. 4342

Taking charge of your health — one text at a time.

For detailed instructions, visit Annie online: mobile.va.gov/annie

VA Mobile

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs