

VETERANS BENEFITS & BEYOND



VA and Social Security Partner to Speed Up Disability Decisions for Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) launched a new Health IT initiative that enables VA to share medical records electronically with Social Security disability processors. This secure process will save time and money resulting in better service for Veterans and dependents who apply for Social Security disability benefits. The SSA requests nearly 15 million medical records from health care organizations yearly to make medical decisions on about three million disability claims. For decades, SSA obtained medical records through a manual process. This new national initiative puts in place an automated process to obtain Veterans' medical records entirely electronically.

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“VA's partnership with Social Security will ultimately improve the quality of life for Veterans and their dependents by enabling Veterans to share their health information within a safe and secure health-related consumer application.”

dependents by enabling Veterans to share their health information within a safe and secure health-related consumer application,” said Dr. David Shulkin, VA's Under Secretary for Health.

The joint venture is expected to significantly speed up Social Security disability decisions, utilizing VA's VLER Health Exchange under the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) Program. The VLER Health Exchange gives VA and participating community providers the ability to retrieve Veterans' health information from each other for the purpose of treatment. Currently, VLER Health Exchange shares health data with over 79 community health care partners, representing 775 Hospitals, 427 Federally Qualified Health Centers, 142 Nursing Homes, 8441 Pharmacies and over 11,969 Clinics. The SSA now has access for the purpose of processing benefits for Veterans and their dependents.

“This SSA-VA partnership is another example of VA's leadership in interoperability efforts among federal partners,” said VA Secretary, Robert McDonald. “Increasing federal partnerships to improve operation and resource coordination across agencies is among VA's 12 Breakthrough Priorities for 2016.”

VA has partnership agreements with Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Treasury (DOT) among many others.

Source: www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2831

INSIDE

VA Expands New Innovators Network Program

VA Releases Major Report on Progress of “MyVA” Transformation Process

OFFICE INBOX
Office News and Events

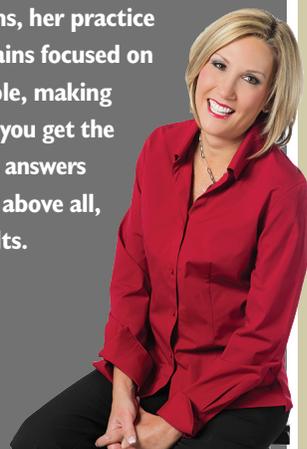
WHAT'S COOKING!
Dangerously Loaded Nachos

Jan Dils





Jan Dils brings her expertise to issues that affect you and millions of other Americans every day. While her knowledge spans the critical areas pertaining to Personal Injury, Veterans' benefits, Social Security disability benefits and related appeals and claims, her practice remains focused on people, making sure you get the right answers and, above all, results.



JAN'S Letter

On a recent weekend trip to the ski slopes (my boys love skiing and tubing!) I had some time to think about how lucky we are to be able to spend time together as a family. And the same can be said for the weekdays, too—my team and I really do think of our clients as family, and we are so lucky to get to know so many brave men and women who served our country.

In looking ahead to the rest of 2017, we are all more committed than ever to showing our appreciation for your service by fighting for the benefits you deserve. That extends to everything we do, including our newsletters. I am so excited to kick off the New Year with some great new articles on an initiative to speed up disability decisions for Veterans, improvements to "MyVA", and more. As always, we have also included the latest news from around the office and our

communities, along with a few items that are just for fun.

If you've received newsletters from us before, you know that I always encourage you to contact us with any questions you may have, and to put our experience and expertise to work for you. Whether you are just starting out, you've been approved for benefits, or at any stage in between, we are always glad to hear from you, and happy to help you understand the process and report on our progress in your case.

Finally, on behalf of the entire Jan Dils team, I want to take a moment to wish you a very happy, healthy new year. We look forward to working with you in 2017!

Sincerely,
Jan Dils



STAY PLUGGED INTO THE PRACTICE
Want the scoop on what's new with our business and the team? You can find it right here, so stay plugged into the practice.

Case Manager **Brittany McLeish** is expecting her second child, a boy, on January 29th. We will keep you posted!

Please join us in congratulating VA Claim File Reviewer **Kris Fluharty**, who was named Team Leader of the newly created C-File pod.

And we are proud to announce the addition of Appeals Clerk **Bethany Maze** and VA Medical Record Reviewer **Maggy Anable** to the VA Team. They are both doing great work, and have made a big impact in a short period of time!



SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE

Maggy Anable

Our new teammate and VA Medical Record Reviewer Maggy Anable was raised in an Army household, then married into the Army three years ago. That helps explain the real dedication and drive she feels for fighting for the rights of Veterans.

After growing up in North Carolina among the 82nd airborne, Maggy received a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from at UNC Wilmington, and she is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling with a concentration in Military Families and Culture.

Maggy moved to West Virginia 5 years ago, and absolutely loves having winter. She and her husband are raising Ava, their "fur baby" terrier mixed hound. When she's not busy working or going to school, Maggy enjoys crafts, reading a good book and venturing to places she has never been.

Please join us in welcoming Maggy to the team, and thanking her for the great contributions she has already made!

COMMUNITY CORNER

On Thursday November 10th, the Jan Dils team held their annual **Veterans Spaghetti Dinner** in Parkersburg. The dinner is Free for Veterans, and \$5 for non-Veterans. This year, the proceeds were donated to Operation Transportation, providing bus passes to Veterans in need in the mid-Ohio Valley. We are very happy to report that the dinner received several donations from local businesses and raised over \$1,000 for Operation Transportation!



VA Expands New Innovators Network Program

The Department of Veterans Affairs Center for Innovation (VACI) is expanding its Innovators Network Program. Fourteen new VA Medical Center innovation sites and one National Cemetery innovation site will join the eight selected last year, for a total of 22 recognized innovation sites across the country. The sites were selected from a highly competitive pool of 44 sites from across the country. The selection was based on a review of 12 parameters, including: proposed Veteran-centered approach, plans to empower and engage employees, and collaboration with local infrastructure enablers.

The VA Center for Innovation identifies, tests and evaluates new approaches to efficiently and effectively meet the current and future needs of Veterans through innovations rooted in data, design-thinking and agile development. Each of the Network sites is focused on building a culture of innovation to support employees working with input from Veterans to design and develop new innovations to better serve Veterans and their families.

“VA continues to increase its ability to rapidly respond to Veterans’ needs and deliver the best possible experience for Veterans. We have invested in creating a culture of innovation which we can constantly find, test and create better ways to deliver services to our Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert McDonald.

The Network began as a pilot in early 2015 and seeks to build and empower a community of VA employees who are actively engaged in innovation. The Network has been a tremendous success in developing VA’s culture of innovation, empowering employees to improve the experience and care of our Veterans, and successfully funding



transformational innovations that significantly reduce costs and improve the care and services available to Veterans. The Network program and Innovation Specialists – dedicated staff at each innovation site – have trained over 1,300 VA employees on innovation-related competencies to help them first recognize, and then solve problems that are negatively impacting or preventing Veterans from receiving the care and services.

To support initiatives, the VA Innovators Network creates a pathway to accelerate the development of new, reimagined experiences for Veterans and their families. The accelerator has invested in 38 projects across the VA. Two of its biggest, Technology-Based Eye Care Screening from the Atlanta VA and the Care in the Community Tool from the Portland VA project to save over \$20 million over the next five years and improve Veterans access to services and care.

The following sites have been selected as Innovators Network Sites for 2017:

- Albany Stratton VA Medical Center, Albany, NY
- Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, Cleveland, OH
- Grand Junction VA Healthcare System, Grand Junction, CO
- Hines VA Medical Center, Chicago, IL
- Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center, Richmond, VA
- Lebanon VA Medical Center, Lebanon PA
- Lexington VA Medical Center, Lexington, KY
- VA Loma Linda Healthcare System, Loma Linda, CA
- New Mexico VA Healthcare System, Albuquerque, NM
- Puget Sound VA Healthcare System, Seattle WA
- VA San Diego Healthcare System, San Diego, CA
- South Texas Healthcare System, San Antonio, TX
- Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, Tuscaloosa, AL
- White River Junction VA Medical Center, White River Junction, VT
- Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Minneapolis, MN

Source: www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2830

“Dangerously delicious” as a hearty snack or meal, this month’s recipe for **Dangerously Loaded Nachos** by VA Case Manager **Bobbie Smith**.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 Cup medium diced onions
- 1 (8 oz.) jar taco sauce
- 1 (15 oz.) can seasoned black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1/4 Cup chopped pickled jalapeños
- 2 Cups shredded extra sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 Cups shredded Pepper Jack cheese

- 1 (12 to 14 oz.) bag tortilla chips
- 1 avocado, peeled, pitted and finely diced
- 1 (10 oz.) can diced tomatoes with green chilies, drained
- 1/2 Cup small diced red onions
- 1/2 Cup cilantro leaves, chopped
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- Sour cream, for serving

Directions: Preheat oven to 350°F. Add ground beef and diced onions to a large skillet and place on medium-high heat. Cook until the meat is no longer pink, then drain beef. In a large bowl, combine the cooked beef, taco sauce, beans, and jalapeños. In a smaller bowl, combine the sharp cheddar and Pepper Jack cheeses. Lay half of the tortilla chips out on a baking sheet or oven-safe skillet. Spread half of the beef mixture over the chips, and top with half of the mixed cheeses. Layer with the remainder of the tortilla chips. Use the remaining beef and cheese to create a second layer. Bake for 20 minutes, or until the cheese is melted.

While the nachos are baking, combine the avocado, tomatoes, red onions, cilantro, lime juice, and olive oil in a separate bowl. When the nachos are done baking, add the avocado mixture on top. Serve with sour cream and enjoy

WORD GAME

A mumbo jumbo is a list of words/hints for you to unscramble. You then take designated letters from each word/hint to come up with the final message that is associated with each hint you have unscrambled.

HERTOM

FARHET

RESSIT

YGOUN

LERGA

Answers: Mother, Father, Sister, Young, Large Family

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VA Releases Major Report on Progress of “MyVA” Transformation Process

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs released a major update on the MyVA transformation, Secretary McDonald’s effort to transform VA into the top customer service agency in the federal government. This third edition of the program’s semi-annual report shows progress in serving veterans with more services, in better time.

“Guided by Veterans’ needs, we’ve left old, unresponsive ways of doing business behind,” writes Secretary Robert McDonald. “We’ve changed leadership. We’ve added staff. We’ve adjusted policies. We’re eliminating bureaucracy and unproductive work. We’re encouraging innovative approaches to serving Veterans, and we’re sharing best practices across the Department. In short, we’re making VA the high-performing organization that it can be, and that my fellow Veterans expect and deserve.”

Key results in the report include:

Veteran trust of VA is on the rise. In June 2016, nearly 60% of Veterans said they trust VA to fulfill our country’s commitment to Veterans – from 47% in December 2015.

VA is **completing more appointments, faster.** In FY 2016, VA completed nearly 58 million appointments—1.2 million more than in FY 2015 and 3.2 million more than FY 2014. More of them are provided by a network of more than 350,000 community providers – a 45% increase in the number of providers since last year.

Processing of disability claims is faster and more accurate, too. The average wait time to complete a claim has dropped by 65%, to 123 days. VA completed nearly 1.3 million claims in FY 2016, and reduced pending claims by almost 90%.

Urgent care is available when a Veteran needs it, and for non-urgent appointments, **wait times are down.** By September 2016, the average wait time for a completed appointment was down to less than 5 days for primary care, less than 7 days for specialty care, and less than 3 days for mental health care.

Veteran homelessness has been cut in half; it’s down 47% since 2010 nationwide, thanks in part to VA’s work with nearly 4,000 public and private agencies.

“We’ve changed leadership. We’ve added staff. We’ve adjusted policies. We’re eliminating bureaucracy and unproductive work.”

Robert A. McDonald
Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary

In the last 18 months, VA has facilitated dozens **more collaborations**, bringing in more than \$300 million in investments and in-kind services to support America’s veterans.

Quality is improving. 82% of VA facilities improved quality overall since the fourth quarter of FY 2015. The report details the changes and innovations, large and small, which produced these results.