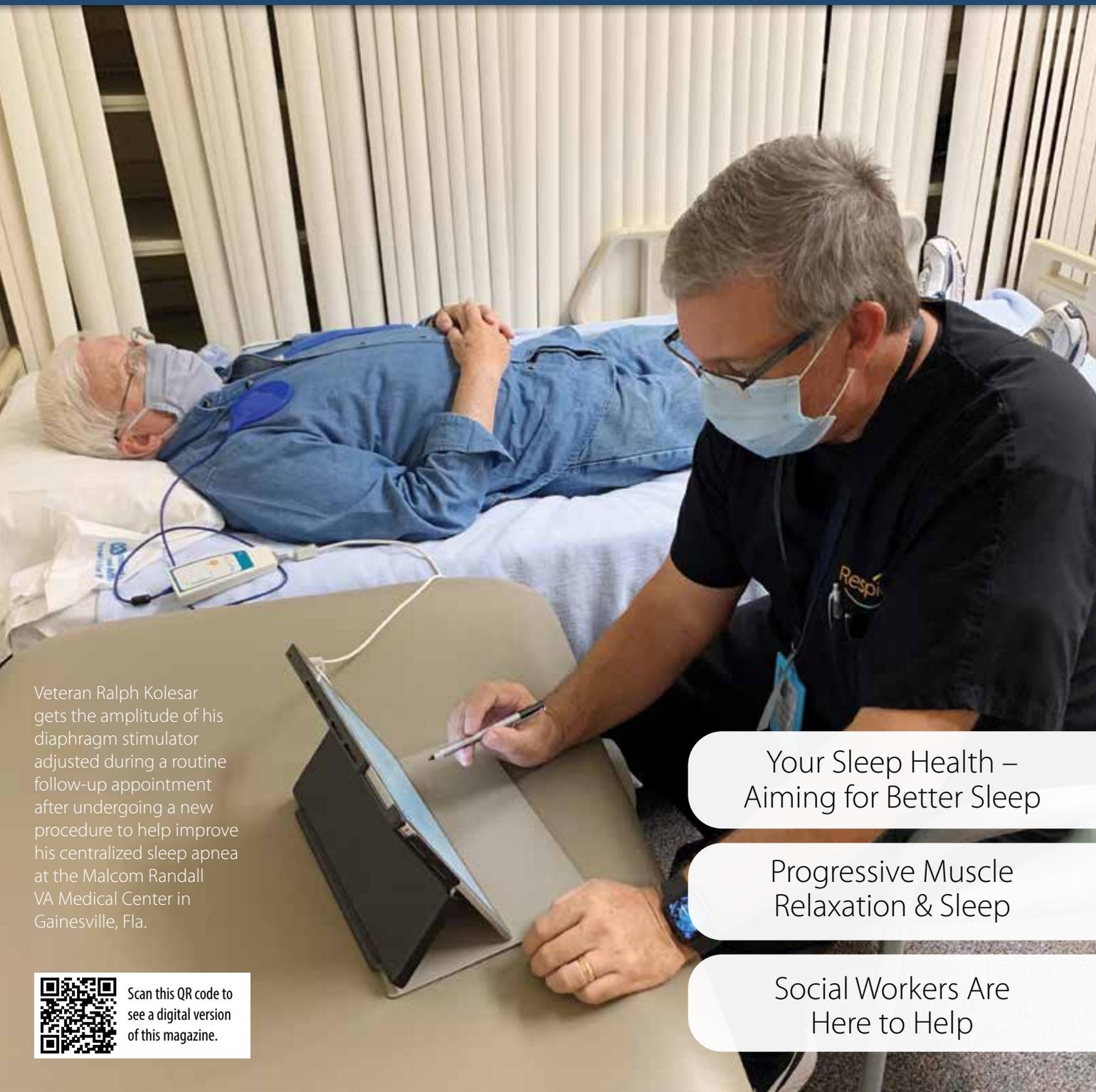


TAKE THIS ISSUE HOME!

# VETERANS Health MATTERS

SPRING 2022

Award Winning Wellness Magazine for **VISN 8** Veterans  
in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico & the U.S. Virgin Islands



Veteran Ralph Kolesar gets the amplitude of his diaphragm stimulator adjusted during a routine follow-up appointment after undergoing a new procedure to help improve his centralized sleep apnea at the Malcom Randall VA Medical Center in Gainesville, Fla.

Your Sleep Health –  
Aiming for Better Sleep

Progressive Muscle  
Relaxation & Sleep

Social Workers Are  
Here to Help



Scan this QR code to  
see a digital version  
of this magazine.

**MANAGING EDITOR**

**Jason W. Dangel**

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

**Mary Kay Rutan**

VISN 8 Communication Manager

**Jason W. Dangel**

VISN 8 Deputy Manager, Office of Communication & Stakeholder Relations

**Michelle Winslow**

VISN 8 Program Manager, Health Promotion & Disease Prevention (HPDP), and Co-Chair, VISN 8 Preventive Care Committee

**Diana Akins**

Bay Pines VA Healthcare System (VAHCS)  
Acting Veterans Health Education Coordinator

**Heather Frebe**

Public Affairs Officer, Orlando VA Healthcare System

**Edwin Aviles-Alvarado**

Veteran Health Education Coordinator  
VA Caribbean Healthcare System

.....

**Veterans Health Matters** is a quarterly health and wellness magazine for Veterans produced by the VISN 8 Office of Communication. VISN 8 is the country's largest network of VA hospitals and clinics serving Veterans in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Your feedback is welcome. If you'd like to comment on the content, please e-mail or write to:

Managing Editor *Veterans Health Matters*  
VISN 8 Office of Communication  
140 Fountain Parkway, Suite 600  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33716

**e-mail:** [visn8communicationoffice@va.gov](mailto:visn8communicationoffice@va.gov)  
**Visit VISN 8 on the web:** [www.visn8.va.gov](http://www.visn8.va.gov)

# To Our Readers



Getting quality sleep is vital to our health and well-being. Taking steps to improve sleep starts with making sleep a priority in our lives. Read on pages four and five about strategies you can use, and VA resources and programs you can access, to help get better sleep. You will also learn about two common sleep disorders: insomnia and sleep apnea. On page six, take a closer look at a self-care practice that has helped many Veterans relax and improve their sleep.

VA's highly trained social workers help Veterans, their families, and caregivers in numerous ways to overcome challenges related to their health and well-being. This can range from help navigating the health care system to coordinating in-home supports for Veterans and their caregivers. On page three, read about the many ways a social worker can help you.

If you have never tried making your own smoothie, check out the easy recipe on page seven. While you are there, have some brain fun with the word search puzzle.

Be well and stay safe!

**Miguel H. LaPuz, M.D., MBA**  
Network Director, VISN 8



## VA App Spotlight: Insomnia Coach

The Insomnia Coach app was created for everyone, including Veterans and Service members, to help manage their insomnia. This app is based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I), which is an effective therapy for insomnia.

**Features include:**

- Guided, weekly training plan to help you track and improve sleep
- Sleep coach with tips for sleeping and personal feedback about your sleep
- Interactive sleep diary to help you keep track of daily changes
- 17 tools to help you get your sleep back on track

To learn more, visit: [www.mobile.va.gov/app/insomnia-coach](http://www.mobile.va.gov/app/insomnia-coach). You can also search for the app and download it from the Apple App Store or Google Play.

# Social Workers are Here to Help

VA Social Workers help meet Veterans' needs in a wide range of situations, from navigating the health care system to coordinating in-home supports, providing counseling, and much more.

## Social Workers Have Many Roles

As a first step, the social worker will often meet with the Veteran and their family or caregiver to do an assessment. The social worker asks questions about health, living situation, family, other support networks, military experience, transportation challenges, and what the Veteran needs help with.

A social worker provides support and services that may include one or more of the following:



### Case Management

Social workers assist Veterans who are at high risk of being admitted to a hospital, have complex medical problems, or who need assistance caring for themselves. They help coordinate a variety of services, including counseling, in-home and caregiver supports, and long-term care options. Help with housing resources, guardianship, advance directives, living wills, and durable powers of attorney is also available. Counseling is offered for drug and alcohol misuse, childcare challenges, adjusting to illness or disability, and more.

### Discharge Planning

Before a Veteran is discharged from a hospital, the social worker will help the Veteran make plans for the support they need in their home or community.

### Education

They help the Veteran, their family, and caregivers understand their medical condition and what services and programs are available. This may include assisting with application for benefits from VA and other government programs. Or it may focus on stress management, dealing with a loss, or connecting with social services and supports in their community.

### Crisis Intervention and Counseling

Social workers provide counseling to help the Veteran get through the crisis and then help with more long-term needs. This may include therapy (individual, family, and group) to address ongoing emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs.

### Reach Out

Social workers can be found in all program areas in VA Healthcare. They are ready to help you with most any need. Contact a VA Social Worker at your nearest VA Medical Center or Vet Center.

# Your Sleep Health



## Aiming for Better Sleep

Getting quality sleep is vital for our health and well-being. During sleep, your brain creates new pathways to help you learn, solve problems, remember information, react quickly, and be creative. Without good sleep, changes occur in your brain that make it more difficult to manage emotions and behaviors, and cope with change. This could lead to feeling more irritable, sad, or anxious. In fact, these changes may increase the risk for depression and harmful behaviors, including suicide.

Lack of quality sleep is also linked with many chronic diseases and conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Sleep also maintains a healthy balance of hormones and a strong immune system.

### Strategies for Better Sleep

Be open to making changes that can affect your sleep. Aim for the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep each night. For most people, this involves training your brain to respond to things differently, finding ways to relax, and managing stress:

- **Make a good sleep environment.** Make your bedroom a TV-free zone. Keep it cool, dark, and quiet. Move bright clocks and cellphones away from your eyes. Make sure pillows, mattress, and sheets are comfortable. Use a sound machine with white noise or a fan to reduce nighttime noises.
- **Have a consistent and relaxing bedtime routine.** Create a target bedtime and try to stick to it each night. (Try to have a consistent wake-up time, too). Turn off your phone and relax before bedtime. For example, listen to soothing music or do some light reading.
- **Avoid stressful activities close to bedtime.** These may be different for everyone, but include watching TV, scrolling negative social media, or having a difficult discussion with a loved one.
- **Meditate or have mindful, quiet time.** A regular mindfulness practice helps calm your mind and body throughout the day and at bedtime. Explore VA's Mindfulness Coach or Insomnia Coach apps at [mobile.va.gov](https://mobile.va.gov).
- **Use guided imagery.** Follow along to an audio recording to focus on peaceful, relaxing images and sounds.
- **Try acupuncture.** This traditional Chinese medicine practice helps many people improve their sleep.
- **Move every day.** Exercise or find ways to move your body regularly. This triggers a need for sleep and relaxes the mind and body.
- **Go outside often.** Daylight supports your body's natural sleep-wake cycle. Connecting with nature also has a calming effect.
- **Don't go to bed too full or too hungry.** Give your body time to digest your evening meal or have a light snack, if needed.
- **Avoid or limit caffeine and alcohol.** Both can interfere with sleep, including waking up through the night.
- **Avoid or limit naps.** If you nap, limit it to 20-30 minutes.



*Dr. Susheela Hadigal, Pulmonologist and Cardiologist, Dr. Ramil Goel follow up with Veteran Ralph Kolesar after undergoing a diaphragm stimulation implantation to help improve his centralized sleep apnea at the Malcom Randall VA Medical Center in Gainesville, Fla.*

## What Are Sleep Disorders?

These are conditions that disturb normal sleep patterns and are long-lasting. Insomnia is the most common sleep disorder, which is being unable to fall asleep, stay asleep, or waking up too early. Sleep apnea is another example. Your airways become blocked, and you stop breathing for 10 seconds or more during sleep. Symptoms may include loud snoring and extreme daytime sleepiness. Effective treatments are available for these and other sleep disorders.

## VA Sleep Resources

- **Sleep assessment:** Identifies the cause of your sleep problems. It includes sleep habits, medical and family history, emotional health, stress management, and sometimes blood or sleep tests.
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I):** Treatment for insomnia that helps identify and change behaviors keeping you awake at night. Also includes relaxation training to help manage anxiety and lower stress levels.
- **Other programs and resources:** Aromatherapy, sound therapy, meditation, acupuncture, progressive muscle relaxation, and other mind-body therapies to help you relax and sleep better

## Path to Better Sleep®

Explore VA's free, online sleep program, available 24/7 at [veterantraining.va.gov](https://veterantraining.va.gov):

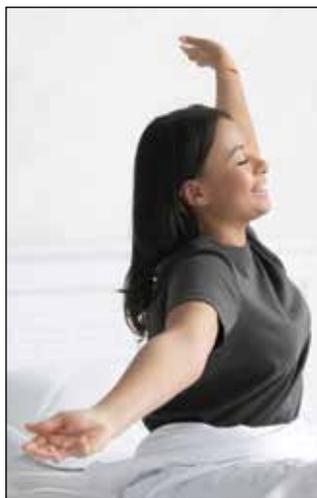
- **Sleep Check-up:** A 5-minute self-assessment to better understand your sleep problems
- **Sleep 101:** A short course to help identify habits that interfere with sleep and form better sleep habits
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia:** An online version of CBT-I that you can do if you are diagnosed with insomnia

### Watch the Video!

Check out the video, "Sleep Health – Aiming For Better Sleep" at [visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp](https://visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp).

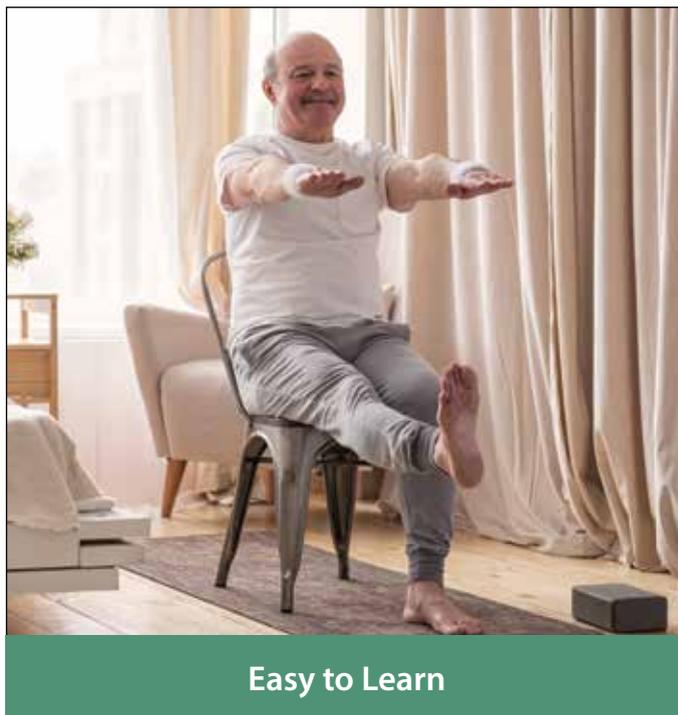


# Progressive Muscle Relaxation & Sleep



This self-care practice may help you get a better sleep.

When sleep problems are ongoing, it can create a lot of stress and anxiety. On the flip side, when you experience a lot of stress and anxiety, it may lead to sleep problems, or a sleep disorder, such as insomnia. Either way, finding ways to relax and relieve stress may lead to better sleep.



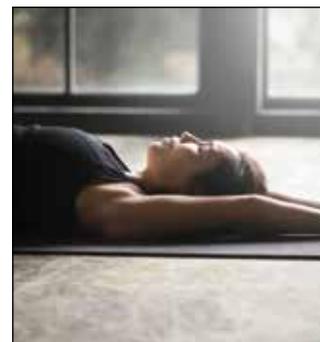
## Easy to Learn

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is an easy, self-care practice you can do to relax and help reduce stress. It can also be an effective treatment for insomnia. There are two steps for doing PMR. First, you tighten or tense one muscle group in your body for a few seconds, and then relax it, paying attention to how it feels to let go. These two steps are repeated in a certain order with several muscle groups in the body.

Once you have practiced PMR a few times, you may be more aware of feelings in your body, like the difference between a tight muscle and a relaxed muscle. You may learn where you carry tension and how to release it. This will help your mind and body relax. You will gain the most benefits by practicing regularly.

## Who Should Not Do PMR?

If you have a history of muscle spasms, serious injuries, or chronic pain, talk to your provider before doing PMR.



## Getting Started

Most people find it helpful to follow along to an audio recording until they learn the steps. Choose a quiet place where you can lie down on your back and stretch out comfortably. You can also do PMR while sitting in a chair. It takes about 10-15 minutes the first time you do it, but you may not need as much time once you practice the technique a few times.

## PMR Resources

- Path to Better Sleep®: [veterantraining.va.gov](https://veterantraining.va.gov)
- Insomnia Coach app: [mobile.va.gov/app/insomnia-coach](https://mobile.va.gov/app/insomnia-coach)
- #LiveWholeHealth, episode #11 Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Sleep: [blogs.va.gov/VAntage/category/health/livewholehealth](https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/category/health/livewholehealth)

# Word Search

Find these words from the stories in this issue of *Veterans Health Matters*. Remember to also look up, down, and backwards. Good luck!

ACUPUNCTURE	M	L	R	E	L	A	X	V	I	T	P
ANXIETY	A	C	U	P	U	N	C	T	U	R	E
CAREGIVER	M	O	V	E	B	X	F	R	H	O	E
COUNSELING	G	U	K	P	T	I	N	E	N	P	L
INSOMNIA	W	N	Y	T	A	E	D	V	R	P	S
MOVE	G	S	J	E	L	T	K	I	O	U	T
RELAX	O	E	T	N	U	Y	W	G	U	S	R
ROUTINE	Y	L	B	S	C	G	K	E	T	O	E
SLEEP	A	I	R	I	W	F	E	R	I	M	S
STRESS	I	N	S	O	M	N	I	A	N	M	S
SUPPORT	M	G	H	N	P	R	O	C	E	P	L
TENSION											

## Refreshing Smoothie



### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup low fat milk (fat free or 1%)
- 1 cup diced frozen mango or pineapple
- 1 small (or 1/2 large) sliced banana
- 1/2 cup fresh spinach

### DIRECTIONS

1. Pour all ingredients into a blender.
2. Blend until smooth and fully combined, about 2-3 minutes.
3. Serve immediately.

#### Nutritional information:

(2 servings). Per serving: 150 calories, 3 g total fat, 2 g saturated fat, 29 g carbohydrates, 3 g dietary fiber, 5 g protein, and 60 mg sodium.

## Free Veterans Health Matters Subscription

To request your free copy of *Veterans Health Matters* and how you would like to receive your subscription, visit [www.healthylife.com/SubscribeVHM](http://www.healthylife.com/SubscribeVHM).

You can also request your free subscription using the following methods: by U.S. mail, email, or phone.

### By Mail:

Fill out your information (please print below) and put in a stamped envelope with this address:

American Institute for Preventive Medicine  
c/o VISN 8 – VHM  
30445 Northwestern Hwy., Ste. 350  
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

(Please print)

First Name	Middle Initial
<input type="text"/>	
Last Name	
<input type="text"/>	
Address	
<input type="text"/>	
City	
<input type="text"/>	
State	Zip
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

### By Email:

[VISN8VHM@healthylife.com](mailto:VISN8VHM@healthylife.com)  
Be sure to include the above information.

### By Phone:

(800) 345-2476 – press 5 for English or press 6 for Spanish



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**  
 Veterans Health Administration  
 VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)

VISN 8 Office of Communication  
 140 Fountain Parkway, Ste 600  
 St. Petersburg, FL 33716



The Right Care, Right Now

**1-877-741-3400**

**Virtual Urgent Care 24/7**

Learn more at

[www.visn8.va.gov/ccs.asp](http://www.visn8.va.gov/ccs.asp)

# VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

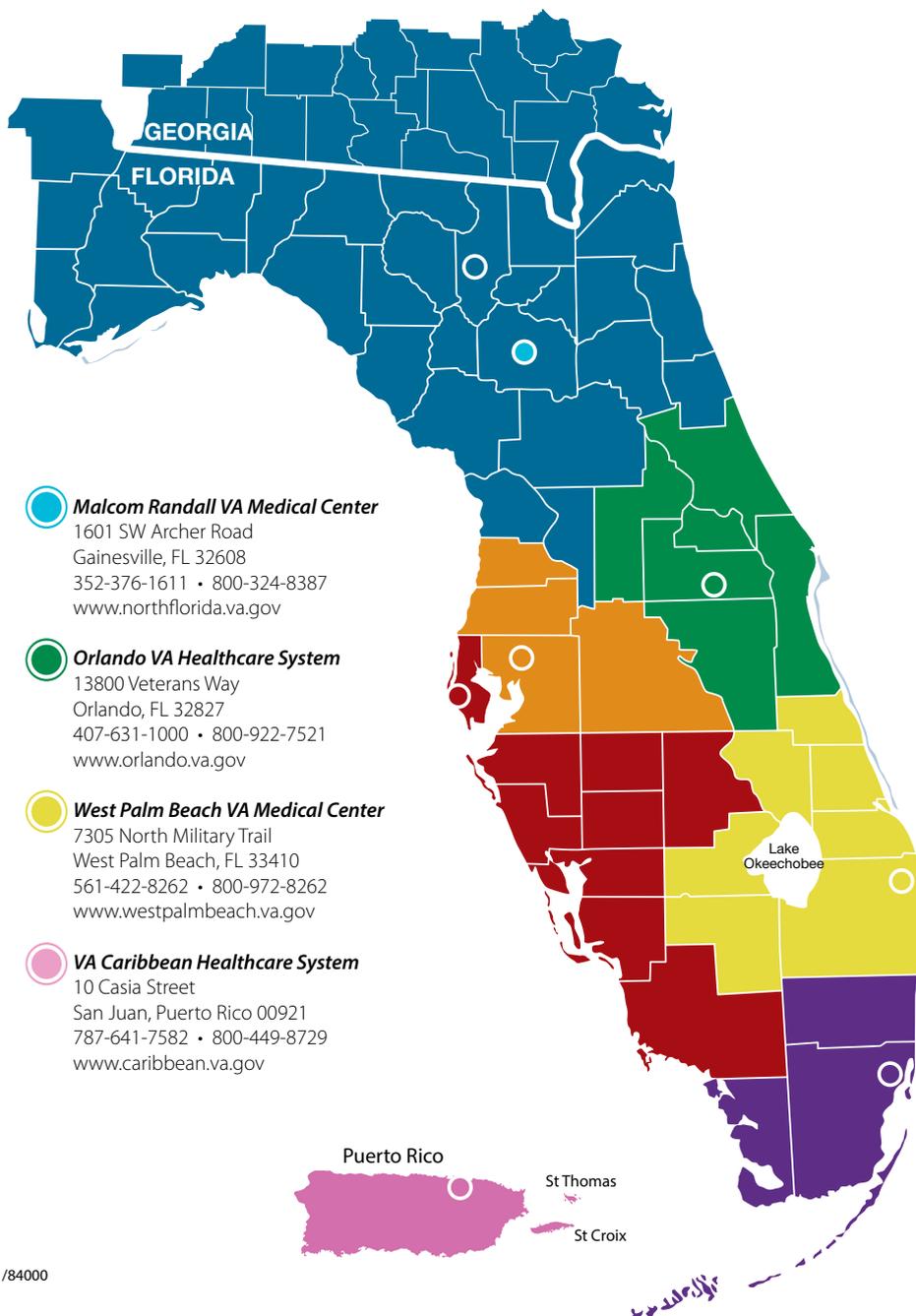
[www.visn8.va.gov](http://www.visn8.va.gov)



at all Medical Centers

**Find a VA hospital or clinic near you:**

[www.va.gov/health/FindCare.asp](http://www.va.gov/health/FindCare.asp)



 **Bruce W. Carter Dept. of VA Medical Center**  
 1201 NW 16th Street  
 Miami, FL 33125  
 305-575-7000 • 888-276-1785  
[www.miami.va.gov](http://www.miami.va.gov)

 **C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center**  
 10000 Bay Pines Blvd.  
 Bay Pines, FL 33744  
 727-398-6661 • 888-820-0230  
[www.baypines.va.gov](http://www.baypines.va.gov)

 **James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital**  
 13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd.  
 Tampa, FL 33612  
 813-972-2000 • 888-716-7787  
[www.tampa.va.gov](http://www.tampa.va.gov)

 **Lake City VA Medical Center**  
 619 South Marion Avenue  
 Lake City, FL 32025  
 386-755-3016 • 800-308-8387  
[www.northflorida.va.gov](http://www.northflorida.va.gov)

 **Malcom Randall VA Medical Center**  
 1601 SW Archer Road  
 Gainesville, FL 32608  
 352-376-1611 • 800-324-8387  
[www.northflorida.va.gov](http://www.northflorida.va.gov)

 **Orlando VA Healthcare System**  
 13800 Veterans Way  
 Orlando, FL 32827  
 407-631-1000 • 800-922-7521  
[www.orlando.va.gov](http://www.orlando.va.gov)

 **West Palm Beach VA Medical Center**  
 7305 North Military Trail  
 West Palm Beach, FL 33410  
 561-422-8262 • 800-972-8262  
[www.westpalmbeach.va.gov](http://www.westpalmbeach.va.gov)

 **VA Caribbean Healthcare System**  
 10 Casia Street  
 San Juan, Puerto Rico 00921  
 787-641-7582 • 800-449-8729  
[www.caribbean.va.gov](http://www.caribbean.va.gov)