

VA has Added 20 New Vet Centers; Expansion Comes a Year Early to Help Combat Vets

Feb 26, 2008

PHILADELPHIA — Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake today said an expansion by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) of its Vet Centers, which provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to returning combat veterans, is well ahead of schedule.

In February 2007, VA announced it would open 23 new centers during the next two years. Fifteen of those centers are already operational, and five others are seeing patients in temporary facilities while finalizing their leases. The other three facilities will begin operations later this year.

"Building on our past successes, 2008 will see a permanent increase in the number of Vet Centers, as we bring the remaining facilities on line to reach a record 232 Vet Centers by the end of the year," Peake said.

"To support this expansion and augment the staff at 61 existing Vet Centers, this year we are channeling a 44 percent increase in funding to the Readjustment Counseling Service, which operates the Vet Centers -- nearly \$50 million more than last year's budget," he added.

The community-based Vet Centers are a key component of VA's mental health program, providing veterans with mental health screening and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) counseling, along with help for family members dealing with bereavement and loved ones with PTSD.

The 15 new Vet Centers that are open in permanent locations are in Binghamton, N.Y.; Middletown, N.Y.; Watertown, N.Y.; Hyannis, Conn.; DuBois, Pa.; Gainesville, Fla.; Melbourne, Fla.; Macon, Ga.; Manhattan, Kansas; Escanaba, Mich.; Saginaw, Mich.; Grand Junction, Colo.; Baton Rouge, La., Killeen, Texas; and Las Cruces, N.M.

Five additional Vet Centers are providing services in temporary space while they finalize their leases: They are in Toledo, Ohio; Ft. Myers, Fla.; Montgomery, Ala.; Everett, Wash.;

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and Modesto, Calif.

The final three locations where Vet Centers will open for clients later this year are in Berlin, N.H., Nassau County, N.Y., and Fayetteville, Ark.

Vet Centers provide counseling on employment, plus services on family issues, education and outreach, to combat veterans and their families. Vet Centers are staffed by small teams of professional counselors, outreach specialists and other specialists, many of whom are combat veterans themselves.

VA's Vet Centers have hired 100 combat veterans back from Iraq and Afghanistan as outreach specialists, often placing them near military processing stations, to brief servicemen and women leaving the military about VA benefits.

These outreach specialists meet with returning veterans, work through family assistance centers and visit military installations to carry the message that VA will be there for the troops and family members after discharge.