



**VA HEALTH CARE** Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

# Veteran Connection

VA Portland Health Care System Newsletter

**Keeping the Promise - Advancing Excellence**



January 2017

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## VA Portland Health Care System

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Produced by the VAPORHCS Public Affairs Office

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS ??  
Please email us at...  
[VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov](mailto:VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov)  
or call 503-402-2975

### Lincoln's Promise (VA Mission Statement)

*"To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.*

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For **VAPORHCS Events and Classes**—got to the VAPORHCS Web page...  
[www.portland.va.gov/calendar.asp](http://www.portland.va.gov/calendar.asp)

## Message from the Director



Michael W. Fisher  
Director, VA Portland Health Care System

January 2017 brought us a change of leadership to our nation as well as

within the VA. We in the VA are delighted that former Department of Veterans Affairs Undersecretary for Health [Dr. David Shulkin](#) was picked by the President to lead the VA as the next VA Secretary. Dr. Shulkin has been with the VA as Undersecretary since July 2015 and has a proven record of making steady and needed changes with measurable, positive improvements across the VA. Once confirmed by Congress, we expect Dr. Shulkin to continue the journey of VA Transformation as Secretary Robert McDonald had previously started to improve access to health care and provide the highest quality of care possible.

As most of you may be aware, the President recently announced a hiring freeze across the federal government as part of an effort to eventually reduce the size of the federal government's workforce. Like most all other agencies,

the VA is impacted as well by this freeze in the near term in the hiring of new staff as of January 22, 2017. Until details are provided with the long-term plan, the full impact on VAPORHCS is unknown and we can't speculate on what it may be. We also could receive new guidance any day that could clarify or change the impact the hiring freeze has on the VA. We expect to know more as the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), in consultation with the Director of Office of Personnel Management (OPM), was directed to recommend a long-term plan. As possible, we will prioritize filling staff positions to those who provide direct patient care to our Veterans.

I want to assure all our Veterans that our commitment to providing the best care possible and executing the mission of the VA - serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans - remains unwavering.

I am proud to be a member of the VAPORHCS team and thankful to have the privilege of serving our nation's Veterans.

Thank you for your service and for letting us serve you.

Michael Fisher

## VETERANS TOWN HALL

**VAPORHCS & VBA Portland Regional Office Veterans Town Hall and Claims Clinic**



**FOR WHO?** Veterans, family members and media representatives are invited

**WHEN?** March 20, 2017; Claims Clinic is 5–7:30 p.m.; Town Hall 6-7:30 p.m.

**WHERE?** [Vancouver Campus](#) Columbia Rm., 1601 E 4th Plain Blvd. & [Facebook Live](#)

**WHAT?** At the **Claims Clinic**, Veterans can

speak to specialist about claims issues or to VAPORHCS Patient Advocates about your specific health-related issues or questions.

At the **Veterans Town Hall**, get the latest updates from the Directors of VAPORHCS and VBA Portland Regional Office and ask questions and speak to staff.

If you would like to be added to the VAPORHCS Partner email list, please email us at [VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov](mailto:VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov)

## - Military Sexual Trauma - A Veteran shares his story to help others

By Phillip Myers

VAPORHCS Public Affairs Volunteer

**M**ichael Beason had a troubled childhood. He was sexually molested at age 10. Was bullied in high school. Was isolated at home, and his relationship with his parents left a lot to be desired. Things came to a head during Christmas time in 1989. Mike's parents told him that he had two choices when he turned 18 years old. That birthday was only one month away.

His choices: join the military or leave home. His choice was a fateful one. In June 1990 Mike decided to enlist in the Army. After completing basic training his first duty station was in South Korea where he served for 11 months.

Three weeks after arriving in Korea, Mike was sexually molested by his first sergeant. "At first, I had no intention of telling anyone what happened to me," said Mike. "However, that would not last long. Within a couple of weeks that first sergeant was caught assaulting another male soldier." Mike explains that a fellow soldier in his platoon told him about the assault. As a result, Mike decided to report his assault to his company commander.

The aftermath from reporting his molestation led to a series of humiliations. "I was ostracized, beat up, my life was threatened," said Mike. "Eventually, I moved out of my barracks and separated from the rest of the company."

Subsequently, the man who raped Mike was brought to trial, convicted and sent to a military prison. However, the punishment for Mike was not over. It was just beginning. He was transferred to Ft. Riley, Kansas. Mike explains that he "was a mess." His new company commander barred Mike from reenlistment and "allowed" him to leave the Army six months shy of his four year enlistment. Mike returned to Oregon and tried to get his life together. He moved in with his parents and after a couple of months, he, once again, was forced to leave due to what he described as "breaking a house rule."

During his stay at Ft. Riley, Mike married and had a son. However, his marriage fell apart due to his problems after he left the service. "I went through so many jobs, that I lost count," explains Mike. "I was convicted of a crime and sentenced to six months work release. I gave up my parental rights after my divorce and allowed my ex-wife's husband

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Army Veteran, actor, body builder, and motivational speaker Michael Beason poses for a photo at the Portland VA Medical Center in 2016. Michael is also survivor of military sexual trauma who, through sharing details of his own personal trials, tribulations and successes, is working to help other Veterans to get the help they need.

## MST - A Veteran shares his story to help others (continued)

to adopt my son. On top of all that, I was drinking every day and fighting. I even tried to kill myself, but, thankfully, the gun misfired.”

In 2000 Mike learned about available care and other resources at the Veterans Affairs that might help him, 10 years after his initial assault. He had found work as a work-study coordinator at VA Portland Health Care System (VAPORHCS) while attending Portland State University. In 2002, he was awarded a service-connected disability and was brought into the VA system. Soon thereafter, Mike was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

“I had a difficult time talking about my feelings. I didn’t want to talk about what happened to me,” Mike said. “All I wanted to do was bury this deep inside myself. My life continued to spiral out of control.”

In 2014, he was provided the opportunity to go to inpatient treatment at the Bay Pines VA Medical Center in Florida. He was there for 11 weeks, and returned again in 2015 for another 11 weeks of therapy and

rehabilitation. After his second round of treatment at Bay Pines, Mike realized that he had to change his life patterns. “I learned a lot through group therapy and being able to share my feelings. My one-on-one therapy was really helpful and I found a route to my future life.”

Mike says that he realized that he would have to take control of his life and discovered that taking care of his

body, as well as his mind, would allow the transformation that he needed and craved. He immersed himself in watching YouTube videos focusing on body transformations. He signed up at a local gym. “The beginning was very slow,” Mike explains. “After the gym workout, I would come home and watch nothing but motivational documentaries and speeches. I was surrounding myself every day with positivity. Meditation helped.”

Mike noticed that he was changing. He was losing weight and mentally feeling stronger. He noticed that the ‘fog’ was beginning to lift from around his brain; and he adhered to his new regimen. Before long he was sharing his new life on his Facebook page. He also reconciled with his parents. All of this was going on while he was still dealing with his PTSD symptoms. He admits that he still has nightmares, panic attacks, anxiety and flashbacks related to his PTSD. “However, I don’t let it stop me. I do my very best to keep moving forward and into the direction of healing. I have come full circle and, today, I know that I will be OK.”

Mike has plans to start his own non-profit organization ([From PTSD to Freedom](#)) helping others who have experienced similar challenges as he has faced. He is planning speaking engagements and is focused on creating a YouTube channel that would educate and entertain viewers who need advice and counsel.

“For more than 26 years, I had forgotten about my fellow brothers and sisters when I left the service. All I wanted to do was leave that horror behind me,” said Mike. “My mission today is to share my story to let others know they are not alone.”

- VAPORHCS -



Army Veteran Michael Beason is one of the actors in this motion picture called “A Sense of Purpose—Fighting for our Lives.” Scheduled for release in the summer of 2017, this fictional movie, inspired by true events, is about an Army medic who struggles to learn how to cope with PTSD and assimilate back into society after she has been sexually assaulted by her commanding officer.

(Movie trailer—<https://youtu.be/e9XyxN76JzA>)

You can reach Michael Beason at [fromptsdtofreedom@gmail.com](mailto:fromptsdtofreedom@gmail.com)



# Women's Health Fair

## "Whole Health Starts with You!"



Friday, March 31  
9 AM to 3 PM

VA Portland, Building 100, Auditorium

Celebrate women Veterans and learn more about the VA services available to support your whole health.

Hands-on Demos

Topics will cover Breast Health, Chaplain Services, Mental Health, Whole Health services, Healing Touch, Yoga, Mindfulness, Acupuncture and more.

Food and snacks provided!

All Veterans and Staff are Welcome!

For full schedule, visit: [www.portland.va.gov](http://www.portland.va.gov)

Free gifts, first 100 women Veterans

SPEAKERS EVERY HOUR

Community and VA services

Questions? Call Christine Krugh  
503-220-8262, ext. 53098



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration



Details are available on the [VAPORHCS Facebook page](#) too!

**Celebrate National  
Wear Red Day with  
Go Red For Women on Friday,  
Feb. 3, 2017, to help save  
women's lives**



While heart disease is a major cause of death for men, heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women and is more deadly than all forms of cancer combined. VA and the American Heart Association's Go Red For Women® are partnering to raise awareness nationwide.

Learn more facts about heart disease in women [here](#).

**VA goes RED  
for women!**

*Add a heart healthy  
lifestyle to your to  
do list.*



# VAPORHCS Amputation Support Group

*Amputees of all levels are welcome*

**WHERE** — Portland VA Medical Center

**WHEN** —Thursdays from 1 to 2:00 p.m.

**HOW to SIGN UP** — call (503) 220-8262  
ext. 57030



### Topics Include:

- Prevention of Amputation in Veterans Everywhere (PAVE) Program & Mission
- Life after Prostheses
- Peer Support and Networking
- Pain Management Strategies
- Trouble Shooting and Problem Solving
- System Navigation and Care Continuity
- Community Supports and Resources

- VAPORHCS -

## ***Veteran Service Officer (VSO) support at VAPORHCS***

Are you looking for help with your VA claim or just have questions? An accredited VSO at PVAMC or the Vancouver Campus can help you. All the details are available on the [VAPORHCS Web site](#).

#### **Multnomah County VSO:**

PVAMC, Bldg. 100, Rm. 3B-100  
 • M-F, 8:30-11:30 by appointment  
 • M-F, 1:30-3:30 walk-in  
 • Contact: 503-988-8387,  
[veteran.services@multco.us](mailto:veteran.services@multco.us)  
<https://multco.us/veterans-services>

#### **Veterans of Foreign Wars VSO:**

Vancouver Campus, Bldg. 15, Rm. 112B  
 • M-Thrs 8:30-3:30 walk-in only  
 • Contact: 360-696-0483  
[vfwvancouver@aol.com](mailto:vfwvancouver@aol.com)

#### **Military order of the Purple Heart VSO:**

PVAMC, Bldg. 101, Rm. 121  
 • Wed only 8:30-3:30  
 • Contact: 503-412-4770

# Veterans: Tax season officially opens Jan. 23

## IRS offers tips and filing help options to Veterans

(From the [VA VAntage Point](#)—Official Blog of the U.S. Dept. of veterans Affairs)



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs



The Internal Revenue Service and partners from the states and tax industry remind taxpayers that the nation’s 2017 individual income tax filing season opens Monday, Jan. 23. The IRS expects more than 153 million tax returns to be filed this year and taxpayers have until Tuesday, April 18, to file their 2016 tax returns and pay any tax due. The deadline is extended because the Emancipation Day, a holiday in Washington, D.C., will be observed on Monday, April 17, pushing the nation’s filing deadline to April 18.

There is a new law that goes into effect this year called the “Combat-Injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act of 2016” – Under federal law, Veterans who suffer combat-related injuries and who are separated from the military are not supposed to be taxed on the one-time lump sum disability severance payment they receive from the Department of Defense. More than \$78 million is owed to an estimated 14,000 Veterans. This law corrects this problem by instructing DOD to identify Veterans who were taxed in order for them to file an amended return to receive their money back. Choosing [e-file](#) and [direct deposit](#) for refunds remains the fastest and safest way to file an accurate income tax return and receive a refund. The IRS anticipates issuing more than nine out of 10 refunds in less than 21 days from the time returns are received. Each year, millions of tax returns are prepared for free by taxpayers using [IRS Free File](#) or by volunteers at community organization sites nationwide.

IRS trained and certified volunteers at thousands of [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Tax Counseling for the Elderly](#) (VITA and TCE) sites nationwide offer free tax preparation and e-filing. VITA offers free tax return preparation to taxpayers who earn \$54,000 or less. The TCE program is mainly for people age 60 or older and focuses on tax issues unique to seniors. AARP participates in the TCE program and helps taxpayers with low to moderate incomes.

To find the closest VITA site, visit [IRS.gov](#) and search the word “VITA.” The [IRS2Go Mobile App](#) can help find free tax preparation assistance, check your refund status and more! Site information is also available by calling the IRS at 800-906-9887. To locate the nearest AARP Tax-Aide site, visit [AARP.org](#), or call 888-227-7669. There are also VITA and TCE sites that provide bilingual help for taxpayers who have limited English skills.

[IRS Free File](#) lets taxpayers who earned less than \$64,000 prepare and e-file a return for free. Go to [IRS.gov](#) and [click on the ‘Filing’ tab](#) for options on using commercial tax software. Commercial partners of the IRS offer free brand-name software to about 100 million individuals and families with incomes of \$64,000 or less. Seventy percent of the nation’s taxpayers are eligible for IRS Free File. Those who earned more than \$64,000 are still eligible for [Free File Fillable Forms](#), the electronic version of IRS paper forms. This more basic Free File option is best for people who are comfortable preparing their own tax returns.

The IRS urges taxpayers to avoid fly-by-night preparers who may not be available after this year’s April 18 due date or who base their fees on a percentage of the refund. The IRS also reminds taxpayers that a new law requires all refunds on returns that claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) or [Additional Child Tax Credit \(ACTC\) be held until February 15](#). This change helps the IRS detect and prevent fraud.

For more information about veterans please go to the [“Information for Veterans” website](#) on [IRS.gov](#).

Note — The VA does not endorse any of these sites, but brings your attention to them as they have free tax services available specifically for Veterans and their families



# Are you caring for someone with Dementia?



## VA Portland Health Care System is pleased to offer *The Savvy Caregiver Program*

**Savvy Caregiver Program** is a six-week series designed especially for unpaid caregivers caring for a loved one with a dementia diagnosis.

**Savvy Caregiver workshops include:**

- ✓ Dementia 101 including types of dementia and how dementia is diagnosed
- ✓ Understanding how dementia impacts your loved one
- ✓ Tips on how to provide the best care
- ✓ Overview of the stages of dementia
- ✓ Behavioral management strategies

<u>Class Location</u>	<u>Class Dates &amp; Times - 2017</u>
West Linn CBOC	Tuesdays 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon January 24, 31, February 7, 14, 21, 28
Portland VA	Fridays 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, April 7
Center for 50+ 2615 Portland RD NE Salem Salem, OR	Tuesdays 11:00-1:00 p.m. April 25, May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

**[Reserve your spot for a workshop today!](#)**

**To register and for more information:  
Call: Kristi Ketchum at  
(503) 220-8262 ext. 58594 or (800) 949-1004 ext. 58594**