



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Walla Walla Veterans Home

92 Wainwright Drive | Walla Walla, Washington 99362 | 509-394-6800 | 509-527-4199 (fax)

September 18, 2021

Dear Walla Walla Veterans Home Resident, Family or Resident Representative:

This letter contains several updates regarding our Home and steps we're taking to care for and keep you and/or your loved one safe.

COVID-19 Screening, Testing, and Results:

This morning we received confirmation that two of our WWVH residents tested positive for COVID-19. We are working closely with the Walla Walla County Department of Community Health and following guidance from them, Centers for Disease Control, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and our State Department of Health to ensure we are continuing to follow the strictest guidance in safeguarding our residents and staff.

We are testing all residents and will continue to screen and monitor for symptoms regularly. Staff are tested twice each week. All staff are screened upon arrival at work each day. This process includes a series of questions around whether symptoms are present, any potential exposures, and a temperature check. In addition, staff are asked to report any symptoms that occur after coming to work. All staff continue to wear PPE in accordance with guidance for nursing home employees.

According to guidance received from the Walla Walla County Department of Community Health, the following steps are to be put in place until 14 days have passed with no additional positive cases:

Activities and Visitation:

A No Visitors policy is in place except for 'compassionate visits'. Our Activities Department is providing 1:1 and individual opportunities during this time. If you would like to schedule a **virtual visit** with your loved one, please call 509-394-6800 during regular business hours M-F, and call 509-394-6890 on weekends or after business hours to schedule or leave a message requesting a call back. If you would like to discuss compassionate visits, please contact WWVH Social Services at 509-394-6816 or 509-394-6821.

I'd like to "pause" here and just share a few thoughts, from the heart...

We understand and genuinely empathize with how difficult this is for families and residents. Our hearts hurt with yours when we have to instate these restrictions. More than you know, we cry inside with you even as we are showing up each and every day to provide care and compassion for your loved one. We are genuinely doing everything in our power to facilitate connection with family for our residents – while also doing what's required to remain in operation by following State and Federal and local guidelines. I wish there was something I could say to help your hearts right now, truly I do. But there's no way around the fact that this is just terribly difficult, and sad, and we are all hoping and praying for the day when we can open our doors and embrace each and every one of you as you come to spend uninhibited quality time with your loved one.

Alright, moving on to a few more updates...

Staffing Challenges:

Like many nursing homes in our region and across the country, we have been experiencing challenges with staffing for several years now, and these challenges have been significantly worse during the pandemic. Yet still, our priority remains the care of you and your loved one(s), and we are working proactively to ensure adequate staffing now and in the coming months.

In order to mitigate some of these staffing challenges, we have taken a number of steps to ensure our veterans and their families are cared for with the dignity and respect they deserve.

- We have used the principles of bed management, which means we temporarily relocated some residents from their permanent room to a vacant room allowing us to consolidate staff members to fewer areas in the Home. Once we are able to re-open the vacant units, these residents will have the option to move back to their original room.
- We stopped new admissions more than 6 weeks ago and will continue to hold on new admissions in order to keep our census at a manageable level until we have enough staff to safely bring in new residents.
- We have significantly increased the starting wage for new nursing assistants in an effort to attract and retain these key staff. WWVH currently pays the top starting wage in the entire region for nursing assistants in health facilities. (\$18.48/hour!) Here's a link to the job posting for nursing assistants at our facility...please feel free to share the link via email or social media, etc. [Nursing Assistant Job Posting WWVH](#)
- We are actively recruiting using careers.wa.gov, many social media sites, and virtual recruiting fairs. Here's a link to the WDVA's brand new, just released recruiting video that features some awesome staff and photos from our very own WW Veterans Home and the other WA State Veterans Homes! [WDVA Recruiting Video!](#)
- We are using contracted agency staff and have requested assistance through our state's Emergency Operations Center. Unfortunately, at this point the EOC request did not lead to any staff members being able to assist, so we have asked that our request be referred to FEMA – and this is currently in process.

Vaccine Requirements:

In regard to the employee, contractor and volunteer vaccine requirements at both the state and national level - our HR professionals are in the process of verifying all employee vaccine status now. Volunteers and contractors have also received information on how to verify their vaccine status so they can continue serving our Veterans and Families.

The Veterans Homes are offering regular vaccination clinics and we are happy to report that we have seen an increase in the number of employees being vaccinated. If the clinic time or date doesn't work for a staff member, we will work with them to provide a vaccine on the spot, or at another time. As we work to gather information on vaccination status, we are also sharing information with staff on important deadlines to get vaccinated and answering as many questions and concerns as possible.

Mask Requirements:

Employees in our Veterans Home continue to wear appropriate PPE at all times. **Changes to the DSHS Safe Start for Long Term Care now require all visitors to wear face masks while in the Veterans Home at all times, regardless of vaccination status.** Residents are also required to wear masks when outside of their rooms at all times, including during group activities, regardless of vaccination status. Residents are able to remove masks while eating in the dining rooms.

Thank you for your support of our staff members as they are working incredibly hard caring for our residents. We continue to chart new ground as the COVID-19 Pandemic evolves; and I am incredibly proud of how our Veterans Home Team, Residents and Families have worked together through these difficult times toward our common goals.

I will continue to keep you updated and always welcome your questions, concerns, and ideas.

With hope and respect,

Lonna Leno
Administrator
Walla Walla Veterans Home