

Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor ~ Gladys Carrión, Esq., Commissioner

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FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Gladys Carrión, Esq.

Office of Children and Family Services

The Guardianship Project

Local district Protective Services for Adults (PSA) units are responsible for serving as guardian of last resort for vulnerable adults with mental or physical impairments who face danger due to their lack of capacity to manage their personal or property needs. Districts fulfill this responsibility either directly or by making arrangements for another entity to serve as guardian on their behalf. Guardianship is a challenging, time-consuming responsibility. OCFS, through its Bureau of Adult Services, on an on-going basis provides districts with training on guardianship requirements and updates on guardianship cases, and regularly provides districts with opportunities to discuss guardianship issues.

A few months ago, Deputy Commissioner Laura Velez and I met with Laura Negrón, Director of The Guardianship Project (TGP), a demonstration program of the Vera Institute of Justice largely funded by grants. TGP accepts appointment by the courts as a guardian for clients in Kings and New York counties. TGP employs a team approach, using caseworkers, lawyers, financial managers as well as a property manager. Most of its clients are persons who are residing in nursing homes or are hospitalized with a discharge plan of a nursing home or other licensed residential care.

TGP has developed a number of good practices in guardianship care, relating to:

- ◆ Emphasis on client choice to the extent possible;
- ◆ Maintaining or returning client to the community where possible, resulting in Medicaid savings through reduction or avoidance of unnecessary hospitalization or institutionalization;
- ◆ Safeguards to ensure protection of client funds and property;
- ◆ Protection of clients from financial exploitation;
- ◆ End of life care; and
- ◆ Property management.

Laura Negrón and staff of TGP will be presenting at the New York Public Welfare Association (NYPWA) Winter Conference in Albany on January 26, 2012. I encourage you to consider attending this session to hear about a progressive model for providing guardianship care, one you may be able to adapt and apply in your district, either as a direct care or a purchase of services model. Please let us know what you think after hearing this presentation!



From the Director:

Alan J. Lawitz

Bureau of Adult Services

THANKS!

To all the PSA supervisors, caseworkers, and our other colleagues, who presented or otherwise participated in the 2011 AATI/NAPSA Conference this past September;

To our multiagency, public/private AATI Advisory Committee, for conceiving and delivering our workshop ideas;

To Brookdale Center for Aging and Healthy Longevity, for expertly coordinating this complex marriage of two major conferences;

To our great partners at NAPSA, both in its central office and its members across the country who led and participated in terrific workshops and networking exchanges at the conference;

Special thanks to Greg Olsen, Director of the NYS State Office for the Aging, for his welcoming remarks;

CONGRATULATIONS!

To Deborah Holt-Knight of NYC HRA APS, and to Anne Marie Cook, Art Mason and all our friends at Lifespan of Greater Rochester, for their NAPSA awards received at the conference in Buffalo.

To all of our 2011 Honorees under our Certificates of Recognition Program for Valued Partners under the PSA Delivery System.

To Paul Greenwood, head of San Diego County's District Attorney's Elder Abuse Unit, on his selection to the 2011 Elder Rights Advocacy Hall of Fame, by the National Association of Legal Services Developers. Paul, a keynote speaker at the AATI/NAPSA conference in September, has been prominent among those who have raised awareness of the problems of elder abuse, and the steps that prosecutors can take to respond to elder abuse.

To NYC HRA Family-Type Home for Adults Coordinator Jerry Victor and his staff, for an impressive meeting of FTHA operators in October, with recognition and praise for many very seasoned operators, and providing a wealth of updates and important information. Thanks for inviting OCFS to participate as well.

To Onondaga County DSS PSA staff and its colleagues who presented their annual Elder Abuse Conference in November, with a great range of presenters and workshops.

HEADS UP!

You'll soon see:

An Informational Letter providing guidance as to permissible means for the sharing of confidential information between CPS and PSA, including new authority under Chapter 440 of the Laws of 2011;

An Administrative Directive providing guidance on implementation of Chapter 412 of the Laws of 2011, relating to the need for supervisory consultations within 24 hours of the refusal of access to an adult believed to be in need of PSA;

Announcement of the availability on OCFS Training Space of the Case Management and Legal Liability Teleconference held on 10/6/11. We have a limited number of DVDs of this training available now. Please let us know if you would like a copy for your office.

And finally, **WELCOME!**

To Assistant Commissioner Lisa Ghartey Ogundimu, who has recently joined OCFS and is heading the Office of Special Populations, which includes the Bureau of Adult Services, as well as the Bureau of Waiver Management Services and the Bureau of Native American Services.

Alan



Cayuga County DSS Nominates County Office for the Aging Services Specialist for Certificate of Recognition

By Karen Stewart, PSA Supervisor, CCDSS;

Nomination by Elaine Daly, CCDSS Commissioner

Corrine Ryan is employed as an Aging Services Specialist with the Cayuga County Office for the Aging. She coordinates support groups for caregivers of people with dementia, provides community education, and has initiated an annual Memory Walk, with proceeds going to people with dementia and their caregivers. Additionally, Corrine has been involved with the Project Safe Return, a GPS bracelet program, since its beginning stages, coordinating with the Cayuga County Sheriff's Department. Corrine was recently awarded a Media Award from the Owasco Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Corrine works very closely with the Cayuga County Adult Protective Services (APS) Unit, not only making appropriate referrals, but also with making joint home visits, helping identify appropriate community supports, and providing follow-up support for shared cases.

Corrine and one of the APS caseworkers, Shelley Augustine, shared a case in which an elderly dementia patient lives in her own home with her daughter (also a senior citizen), who is the sole caregiver with minimal support from a handful of friends. The elderly patient has the GPS bracelet as she still wanders on occasion. These bracelets require a monthly battery change. Corrine has taught Shelley how to change the battery, so now the battery changes are a part of the APS monthly home visit routine, thus saving the client from having to come to the County Office Building.

Shelley identified a need for a ramp, to allow the elderly person to go to medical appointments. Corrine was able to use her funding streams to allow the building of a ramp. Now the caregiver can safely take the elderly person down the ramp in her wheelchair, which makes life easier for both parties.

Corrine has also provided in-home education and support for the spouse of another elderly dementia client. She and the APS caseworker have made useful suggestions to not only relieve caregiver stress, but to encourage the caregiver to consider placement of the elderly person. Corrine has facilitated updating the Patient Review Instrument (PRI) in hopes of securing timely placement for the elderly person. She has been professional in her dealings with the caregiver's spouse during the difficult transition period.

New York AATI and NAPSA Co-Host Highly Successful Conference in Buffalo

The combined 18th annual Adult Abuse Training Institute (AATI) and the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) conference held this past September in Buffalo had quite a few “firsts” associated with it:

First NAPSA conference ever held in New York State;

First AATI to have as many as 530 attendees from New York and 23 other states;

First AATI with over 70 workshop presentations on a wide range of topics relating to protection and care of adults;

First AATI held in Buffalo;

First AATI welcoming address including opening lines from “*New York State of Mind*” and “*Buffalo Gals*”

Keynoters Candy Vogel (ADA from Buffalo) and Paul Greenwood (ADA from San Diego) addressed issues raised in elder abuse prosecutions, and stressed the need for PSA, police and district attorneys to work closely together to protect vulnerable adults.

U.S. HHS Administration on Aging Assistant Secretary Kathy Greenlee received an award from NAPSA for her advocacy in support of protection of vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect and exploitation. The OCFS Certificate of Recognition Awards were also presented at the session.

Very positive feedback has been received from both New Yorkers and our out-of-state guests about the quality of the workshops presented. NAPSA in its newsletter also thanks OCFS, Brookdale “and all the terrific New Yorkers who were so warm and welcoming to their colleagues from across the country.”

Here are some pictures from this memorable conference.



Candace Vogel, ADA Erie County, giving keynote address; Alan Lawitz, OCFS Director, Bureau of Adult Services, on the left



Paul Greenwood, ADA San Diego County, discussing his experiences prosecuting elder abuse



A large and attentive group of conference attendees



HRA APS Bronx Borough Director Isaac Monserrate presenting at workshop



Art Mason, Past NAPSA President and Elder Abuse Trainer for Lifespan of Greater Rochester, receives NAPSA award



Conference Partners: Andy Capehart, NAPSA Assistant Director; Kathleen Quinn, NAPSA Executive PSA Director; Paula Vielkind, OCFS; Alan Lawitz, OCFS; Karen Kissinger, OCFS; Bill Benson, NAPSA National Policy Advisor; Mike Cahill, OCFS



Deborah Holt-Knight, NYC HRA APS Director of Client Services Receiving NAPSA award from Joe Snyder of Philadelphia, PA

PSA Partners Receive 2011 Certificates of Recognition

This fall, OCFS announced it had awarded Certificates of Recognition for Outstanding Partners in the Protective Services for Adults Delivery Network to 18 individuals and organizations across the state. Certificates were presented by OCFS Bureau of Adult Services (BAS) Director Alan Lawitz at the AATI/NAPSA conference in Buffalo on September 22, 2011. OCFS BAS staff have participated in several local presentations as well, together with the local district commissioners who submitted nominations of their valued partners.

OCFS Commissioner Gladys Carrion, Esq., stated that “since many PSA clients require services and benefits from more than one agency, it is crucial that PSA work collaboratively with other public and private organizations and individuals, constituting a PSA Delivery Network, to help protect vulnerable adults. Through our Certificates of Recognition Program, we hope to increase public awareness of and appreciation for the often unsung work done on a daily basis by these dedicated professionals to protect elderly and disabled adults from harm, and to assist them to live safely in the community. We applaud these honorees for their very important work. Congratulations for a job well done!”

The PSA partners nominated by local commissioners have ranged from a mental health assessment and crisis team; an SPCA assisting PSA with animal hoarding and other cases involving helping to care for the pets of clients; the geriatric services unit of a medical center; church-based social services organizations; a family violence prevention council; and, in several cases, the local office for the aging.

The following lists both the nominating social services district and the partner nominated by the district for the 2011 honorees.

Nominating District

Broome County DSS
Cayuga County DSS
Clinton County DSS
Columbia County DSS
Dutchess County DSS
Genesee County DSS
Jefferson County DSS
Lewis County DSS
Livingston County DSS
New York City HRA

Onondaga County DSS
Orange County DSS
Rockland County DSS
St. Regis Mohawk Tribe
Saratoga County DSS
Suffolk County DSS

Washington County DSS
Westchester County DSS

Outstanding Partner

Family Violence Prevention Council/Multidisciplinary Community Response
Corinne Ryan, Aging Services Specialist, Cayuga County DHHS
Joint Council for Economic Opportunities
Assessment and Crisis Team, Columbia County Department of Human Services
Hudson River Housing
Pastor Marty MacDonald, Batavia City Church
Mark Waterhouse, Case Manager, Transitional Living Services
Lewis County Office for the Aging
Faith In Action, Catholic Charities of Livingston County
Beatrice A. Maloney, LCSWR, Supervisor, Geriatric Services, Department of Social Work and Home Care, Beth Israel Medical Center
Vera House, Elder Abuse Education
Darrell Dirr, Proprietor, American Fine Art and Antiques and Estate of Mind
Rockland County Office for the Aging
St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Office for the Aging
Tubbs Family Type Home for Adults
Paula Giacoia, Director of Senior Citizen Services, South Hampton Town Senior Services
SPCA of Upstate New York
Elder Abuse Coalition of Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF THE HONOREES!



Alan Lawitz, OCFS; Morgan Thurston, Onondaga County DSS, PSA Director; Jennifer Hicks, Vera House, Elder Abuse Educator, holding Certificate



Deborah Holt-Knight, NYC HRA APS; Carmen Hernandez, NYC HRA APS Manhattan South; Beatrice Maloney, Supervisor, Geriatric Services, Beth Israel Hospital, holding Certificate; Deb Greenfield, OCFS

**SPCA of Upstate New York,
Valued Partner of PSA in Washington County
By Washington County DSS Commissioner Tammy DeLorme
and (former) PSA Senior Caseworker Debbie Myers**

The SPCA of Upstate New York is a nonprofit organization. It receives no funding from federal, state or local agencies. Instead, it relies on support from individuals and businesses, shelter adoption fees, dues, gifts, bequests and special events. In addition to the financial support they receive from the community, they are staffed by a wonderful network of volunteers who selflessly give of their time and talents in support of their mission. The SPCA of Upstate New York is the largest NO-kill shelter north of New York City.

While there was always an informal connection between DSS and the SPCA, the need had increased for more organized collaboration on difficult cases. So, for the past 14 years, the SPCA and Protective Services for Adults in Washington County have formally partnered to take care of our common population.

There are many times where a Protective Services for Adults caseworker has to be very creative in his/her approach to working with the population that we serve. There can be many barriers that arise in providing that needed care. One such barrier to a client being willing to accept services or change is their beloved pets. What do we do with someone's dog when they die? Who can care for the cats or dogs when that client has to enter the hospital or a nursing home for rehabilitation or permanent stay? Who can assist in urgent medical care, sterilization, and food for the companions of our poorest adult clients? When we enter a house that is being condemned as a health hazard, what can be done for the animals that also have resided there? These are only a few of the instances in where PSA in Washington County has relied on the assistance of our SPCA.

The SPCA of Upstate NY has established an animal food pantry for needy individuals that our caseworkers can access any day without question. We have collaborated together on criminal cases and domestic violence cases and they have housed the animals from these cases for us free of charge. We have used them to assist in getting animals neutered at a very reduced cost for our clients, thus preventing overpopulation at our elderly clients-homes.

The SPCA of Upstate NY has been instrumental in making several referrals to PSA in Washington County over the years. They have identified hoarders and other elders at risk when they are out on calls and have worked in conjunction with our assigned staff to the betterment of all in the household. The SPCA has also joined our staff on many home visits to speak to the owners and assist with needed care, and/or removal of neglected and abused animals. Affidavits from our local SPCA of Upstate NY have also assisted PSA in guardianship cases or other legal matters, where it was necessary to show a sustained pattern of self-neglect.

One PSA case in particular comes to mind in the northern part of Washington County. An elderly couple resided way back in the woods off the South Bay of Lake Champlain. During the winter months, their home was only accessible by walking across the frozen bay, up railroad tracks and a trail through the woods. This particular winter it was well below zero – there was a significant amount of snow. The elderly wife was in the local hospital and the husband also took ill. He was in town at the physician's office and needed to go to the hospital. He was refusing medical care due to the many cats that they were caring for in their two cabins. The SPCA staff hiked in the two-plus miles through the heavy snow and across the frozen bay to assess the animals in need. What they discovered were emaciated, neglected and dead cats.

There were 101 animals involved, some dead and others in critical condition. The SPCA staff spent over six hours hiking back and forth to collect the live and dead animals and remove all of them. They enlisted the assistance of the Queensbury Fire Department air boat to assist with the transport to move the animals over the bay and to the shore. Staff then transported the animals back to the shelter for immediate care and feeding, working until the break of dawn to save as many as possible. With only a couple hours-break, staff returned to continue the chore of rehabilitation and care. Once our PSA client knew that his animals were going to be cared for, the man consented to treatment and also entered the local hospital. PSA was then able to continue our work with this gentleman and his wife to ensure a better quality of life for them. Neither of these individuals was able to return home, but rather entered a care facility, until their passing. The SPCA and PSA presented this case to the local District Attorney's office, as is our protocol. It was decided among us all that prosecution would serve no purpose in this case due to this couple's mental and physical status.

There are times when an individual can no longer care for themselves or their companion animals and it is times like that where the unity of our two agencies becomes most important. To care for humans and animals alike in a dignified and humane manner, benefits everyone involved.

In our opinion, the years of professional association with our local SPCA has been most beneficial to our agency and to the residents of our county. The staff of our SPCA of Upstate NY are among the many unsung heroes who quietly go about their work, and receive their rewards from the look on the faces of the animals that they have saved and cared for. It is a 24-hour-a-day job and one that takes no holidays, and for this we feel that they deserve not only our appreciation, but recognition for a job well done.



Jodie Smith, WCDSS PSA Supervisor, Mike Cahill, OCFS, Bureau of Adult Services; Cathy Cloutier, Executive Director SPCA of Upstate NY, holding Certificate; Debbie Myers, formerly WCDSS PSA Senior Caseworker, now working at the SPCA

Genesee County DSS:
Pastor Marty and Batavia Church Exemplify
the Word and Spirit of the PSA Delivery Network

By Cheryl Venditte, Genesee Co. DSS PSA Supervisor
Nomination by Eileen Kirkpatrick, Commissioner, Genesee County DSS

Genesee County is a small rural community with approximately 60,000 residents. We officially serve approximately 130 PSA clients, many of whom we are the representative payee for their SS benefits. A great majority of these folks only receive \$761 each month and we struggle to pay all of their bills with this amount. There is often nothing left over for such luxuries as shampoo, conditioner, soap, toothbrush and toothpaste. The women that we have on our caseload struggle to find money to purchase feminine supplies; those with incontinence issues find themselves in need of Depends, yet are sometimes too embarrassed to ask their physician for a prescription for this.

Our unit (Adult Services) also includes an intake worker for the Department, Richard Bennett, whose job title encompasses a wide variety of duties. When someone presents as homeless at the department, if they are eligible we place them in a rooming house. However, there is no money left over for them to purchase any of the above named luxuries, and no money for clothes.

City Church is a non-denominational church located in the center of Batavia. They officially opened their doors downtown after much renovation 10 years ago. The building was once a theater downtown and is a familiar site for many of the county's long-time residents. It is a non-threatening kind of place where many of our adult clients feel they can wander inside on a Sunday morning without judgment being cast in their direction. The pastor was once a local farmer; one of the elders serves as a chaplain at the local jail. Their mission is to serve the people of our community in whatever way they can, and located downtown, the staff at the church are aware of, and encounter often, those folks who are in need of assistance.

For the past 10 years, Pastor Marty Macdonald has partnered with our PSA supervisor, often seeking counsel regarding various situations, or making an official Adult Protective referral when appropriate. Through various established programs at the church, he and his staff have served our adult community.

Each Saturday morning a group of volunteers goes into the community through the Adopt-A-Block program, finding needs and filling them. They have cleaned and painted houses, cleaned and mowed lawns, distributed food and in general try to serve those in need. When PSA knows of a specific need in the community, the Adopt-A-Block folks are always willing to do a home visit and assist if possible.

Each year the church hosts a Fall Fling for the community at large, offering free food, clothing and used furniture/appliances for those in need. There are also information tables (of local organizations), health professionals, entertainment, fun activities, and free hotdogs at the event. The PSA staff informs their clients of this event and many of our folks that we serve attend.

The church has received many donations of clothing which are always available to our needy adults. There is also a storage room filled with used wheelchairs and walkers which our staff can and have used whenever a need arises. The staff at the church are very quick to respond to our needs, opening up the Clothing Connection Closet or the storage room whenever we call the office.

The church has, over the years, received donations of food and other miscellaneous supplies. Knowing of our desperate need for the “luxuries” in life, we have been contacted several times to come and take boxes of shampoo, conditioner, soap, feminine products, and toothbrushes, etc. These have been put in a storage room at DSS and are given out to our PSA clients when needed. Also, these items are often given to those who are homeless and would otherwise be placed in a rooming house with nothing. When food is available, the church has donated it to our PSA staff to distribute to those who could use the assistance. Vouchers have been distributed to our vulnerable adults when the church sponsors events in which there is free food and supplies to be given away. The church has been very generous to our PSA clients, and remembers them when they have donations which can be shared.

A few years ago, the church received - among their other donations - a large box of hand sanitizers. They called us and we placed a small bottle of this necessary product on the desk of all of our DSS staff. Sometimes the staff at DSS become the recipient of “out of the box” blessings that the church receives. Once the church received a large donation of candy. Again, we received a phone call and the next morning, all of the staff at DSS (not just the PSA staff!) found a note on their desk explaining:

“On your desk you will find some “goodies,” comfort food (hopefully), a stress-relieving mixture. I wish we could give you a raise or a bonus, but none of us have the power to do so, so this will have to do. Please accept it with a smile. We know how very stressful all of our jobs are – and I can always use chocolate after a difficult day!”

Finally, City Church has a weekly dance program, where young boys and girls are taught not only how to dance, but basic Christian principles. You may wonder how this applies to our Adult Protective clients, but stay with me...Charging a tuition was never the Director’s intention, but bills do have to be paid. Expenses for lights, the dance room and supplies need to be covered, so a modest tuition is charged. The Director’s heart is always in the right place, believing that everyone should have the opportunity to dance. This past year, one of our adult clients had a daughter who simply wanted to dance. The adult client was on public assistance and there was no way that she could afford the modest tuition, so arrangements were made for this to be waived. What a blessing for this mom, and for this young girl to spend an hour each week with someone who loves kids and simply wants to teach the kids to dance.

Life as a PSA caseworker often means seeking out other resources to be able to serve your clients. We do the best that we can to serve those in our community, those in need, those who at this moment need our help. We appreciate our partnership with City Church in serving those in our community, in serving folks in all sorts of ways!



Pastor Martin MacDonald of City Church, holding Certificate, with Cheryl Venditte, Genesee Co. PSA Supervisor, and Alan Lawitz, OCFS

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF VETERANS BENEFITS!

**By George Basher, Health Systems Specialist,
VA Health Care Upstate Network**

America's veterans - by virtue of their service - are eligible for a myriad of benefits that frequently can make the difference between having an independent life or total dependence on community services and resources. When working with veterans to achieve stability, there are three obvious areas to consider: income, housing, and healthcare.

INCOME

There are two Veteran's Administration (VA) programs that can provide regular monthly payments to veterans – VA Compensation and Non-service Connected Pension. Compensation is paid for disabling injuries or illness that occurred during the Veteran's military service. Once service connection is established, the disability is rated from 0% - 100% in 10% increments. For a single veteran, a 20% rating generates a monthly payment of \$243, 60% is \$974, and 100% is \$2,673. This payment is non-taxable and is not "countable" income for other federal benefits. In addition, establishment of service connection for an injury or illness also provides for lifetime care of that condition and any secondary conditions arising from it at VA medical facilities. A common example is a Vietnam veteran who has type II diabetes – VA considers this condition presumptive as a result of Agent Orange exposure in the combat theater. Not only will VA help manage the diabetes, but also conduct appropriate care of all associated conditions (eyes, heart, etc.). Any prescription medication associated with the care is also included.

Pension is paid to low-income veterans who become permanently disabled for reasons not connected to their service or are 65 years of age or older. The amount paid is income based, with a maximum annual income allowed for a single veteran of \$11,830 and a single housebound veteran of \$14,493. The VA will pay the difference between the Veteran's annual income and the maximum in monthly installments. Additional dependents and unreimbursed medical expenses can add to this amount. Veterans who qualify for pension also qualify for VA healthcare at no cost for any and all conditions.

Enlisting the assistance of a State Veterans Counselor or County Service officer in applying for compensation or pension will help maximize the benefit for the veteran and expedite the processing of the claim. They will also completely review a veteran's record and identify any additional benefits they may be entitled to and make application for those as well.

HOUSING

Stable, safe housing is absolutely necessary for all people, including veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs places special emphasis on ending homelessness among veterans and has a number of programs in place toward that end. VA has long provided transitional housing – with stays of up to two years in a community program that also provides services to help regain the life skills necessary for independent living. Recognizing that not all veterans can successfully live independently, VA and HUD created VA Supported Housing vouchers – similar to regular HUD Section 8 vouchers that can be used to subsidize rent payments. The VASH voucher is less restrictive than Section 8 – the only exclusions are for registered sex offenders and veterans over the income threshold. VASH vouchers also include VA case management for the veteran to ensure necessary services are provided to help the veteran maintain their housing.

A recently introduced program provides grants to community organizations to offer supportive services for veterans and their families that allow them to remain in a stable housing situation.

VA also assists veterans who are involved in the criminal justice system through the Veteran Justice Outreach program. Licensed clinicians work with law enforcement, jails, courts, and prosecutors to provide veterans opportunities for treatment of substance abuse and behavioral health conditions, frequently avoiding criminal records and the problems associated with them. For veterans being released from incarceration, VA has a program to assist them in accessing VA care, employment services, and housing. In New York State this includes a successful program to negotiate modifications to child support payments that allow veterans to meet their obligations consistent with their ability to pay.

VA has a Homeless Hotline call center (1-877-424-3838) that operates 24/7 to provide information on housing programs and connect veterans, family members, and caregivers to the nearest VA Homeless Program Coordinator for assistance.

HEALTH CARE

VA Healthcare is widely available throughout New York State. There are twelve VA Medical Centers providing inpatient and specialty care and fifty Community Based Outpatient Clinics providing primary and outpatient care. VA provides a complete spectrum of medical and mental health services. The closest VA facilities can be located through the VA National website (www.va.gov).

Veterans who have service connected injuries or illnesses are eligible for care for those conditions and can be treated for other conditions using private insurance. Veterans whose annual income is below the means test threshold (\$29,402 for a single veteran, \$35,284 for Veteran with one dependent) are also eligible for VA care. Additionally, veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are eligible for VA healthcare for five years following their separation from active duty. Specific questions on eligibility can be answered by the VA Eligibility Center at 1-877-222-8387 (VETS).

It is important to ask every client if they have ever served in the United States military - and if the answer is affirmative to have a local New York State Veterans Counselor (www.veterans.ny.gov) or county Veterans Service Agency representative help connect the veteran to the benefits they are eligible for. These are trained professionals who work in partnership with VA and can help you and your veteran clients be successful.

