
Member Handbook:

Veterans Bridge to Recovery (VBR)

A Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center

**Updated
January 2019**

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WELCOME!

We're glad you are joining the Veterans Bridge to Recovery program. We hope your time here will be rewarding. We want to work with you to create a positive, encouraging environment in which everyone works together to reach their recovery goals.

RECOVERY

Recovery is defining your life and pursuing your goals even with the challenge of mental illness. Recovery means developing a new sense of meaning and purpose beyond the effects of mental illness. Recovery is different for everyone. Here are a few thoughts on recovery from VBR members and staff:

Recovery is...

...taking one day at a time. --Russ W.

...finding our strengths.—Steve F. and Pat K.

...staying on task.

...at our own pace. --Tim D.

...a wave and not a line.

...doing positive things.

...trying something different and getting different results.—John R.

...being sober.

...possible.

...stockpiling tools. – Tim R

Another veteran added:

“Attitude is a little thing that makes a BIG difference.”

VBR MISSION STATEMENT

- “Working together toward recovery and community integration.”

- Programs like VBR have been started in many VA medical centers. They are:
 - transitional educational centers.
 - places that instill hope, validate strengths, teach skills, and facilitate community integration.
- The goal of programs like VBR is to offer veterans experiencing serious mental illnesses an opportunity to:
 - define and pursue their vision of their future.
 - More fully integrate into the community of their choice.
 - Access services and supports needed for recovery and community integration.

LOCATION AND HOURS OF OPERATION

- At the VA Community Resource and Referral Center:
 - 1201 Harmon Place, Minneapolis, MN 55403
- Program hours: Monday-Friday 9a-4p
- Building hours: Monday-Friday 7am-6pm

IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Main CRRC number: 612-313-3240
- VBR Program Manager: Lisa Barrett, LICSW: 612-313-3286
- Recovery Coaches:
 - Ben Fischer, LICSW: 612-313-3280
 - Karey Mason, RN: 612-313-3278
- Peer Specialist: Michelle Kelly: 612-313-3279
- *For after-hours assistance:*
 - EMERGENCIES: Call 911
 - URGENT: Call 612-725-2000 and ask for the psychiatrist on duty or
Call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255
 - NON-urgent: Leave a voicemail message on the CRRC voicemail or with your coach
- VBR website: www.minneapolis.va.gov/services/vbr.asp

VBR STAFF

- Strive to create a healthy, encouraging, supportive community.
- Are committed to providing ethical care in accord with the standards of their professional disciplines and our program code of ethics.
- Will work with you to help you define your personal vision of recovery.
- Will work with your outpatient mental health providers.

- Will work with your family members and/or other supporters if you want them involved in your care.

Program Manager/Social Worker: Lisa Barrett , LICSW

Lisa oversees the VBR program. She conducts informational and screening meetings, educational classes, assessments, and recovery coaching sessions . She also accompanies veterans during community integration activities.

Nurse: Karey Mason, RN

Karey conducts wellness assessments, recovery coaching sessions, and educational classes. She also accompanies veterans on trips into the community.

Social worker: Ben Fischer, LICSW

Ben conducts intake assessments, recovery coaching sessions, educational classes, and accompanies veterans on community trips. He has experience helping people get and maintain employment, and has a strong interest in health and wellness

Recovery Coaches

Your recovery coach will be your primary staff contact at VBR. S/he will help you develop your Recovery Plan. Your coach can help you think about your goals, break goals down into specific steps, identify resources, and solve problems. Please think of your coach as a consultant. S/he has information about resources and can help you think through your goals and how to reach them. S/he will also help you create a plan for how and when you will transition to senior membership in VBR. You can meet with him/her at VBR or in the community.

Peer Support Specialist: Michelle Kelly

Peer Specialists promote recovery by sharing their own recovery stories, providing encouragement, instilling a sense of hope, and teaching skills to Veterans.

ADMISSION CRITERIA (WHO CAN PARTICIPATE)

- Vets must have a diagnosis of a serious mental illness (e.g. schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, severe PTSD, recurrent & severe depression, or schizoaffective disorder).
- Vets must have trouble functioning in their community of choice (i.e. serious symptoms that interfere with daily living and/or difficulty maintaining a job, social network, or participating in school).
- Vets have a primary mental health provider outside of VBR.

- Vets must want to make changes in their lives.
- Vets must be willing and able to learn new skills and work toward goals.
- Vets should not be actively abusing substances.
- Vets with a history of violence or other behaviors that would endanger a milieu-based treatment program may not be allowed to join.

COSTS

- VBR is considered a basic service. If you have a copayment for services, you will be charged \$15 for each day that you use VBR services. If you do not know whether you have a copayment, you can contact the Means Test office by phone at 612-467-2022 or in person at room 1S-144 (near the Cashier). You can also contact the Patient Family Center by phone at 612-467-2106 or in person at room 1S-114.
- For additional information on costs of VA services, see this website: <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/cost/>
- Some program-related activities require travel via public transit and/or admission fees to local attractions. If you choose to attend these activities you may need to pay your own way. Information about cost will be posted on sign-up sheets and the program calendar.

REFERRAL AND INTAKE PROCESS

- Veterans or their mental health providers can refer vets by calling the Program Manager at 612-313-3286 or placing a consult in CPRS.
- After a veteran is referred, the Program Manager will review his/her medical record to make sure s/he meets admission criteria (see previous section for admission criteria).
- The Program Manager may speak with the veteran and/or the referring provider to gather more information about the veteran and assess whether VBR fits the veteran's needs.
 - If VBR does not appear to be a good fit, the Program Manager will talk with the veteran and/or the referring provider about other services in the community or at the VA that might better fit his/her needs.
- If VBR appears to be a good fit, the Program Manager will offer the veteran a trial period. Veterans can attend up to 4 weeks of VBR programming during the trial period. During this time the veteran and staff will be evaluating the fit between

veteran needs, goals, behavior and programming. Vets will be expected to attend at least twice per week during this time.

- After the trial period, the veteran will be invited to an intake appointment.
 - This appointment takes 2 hours and involves answering questions about your history, goals, strengths, and problems; filling out questionnaires; and reviewing information about the VBR program. The veteran will choose an orientation date and a preference for his/her coach.
- The veteran will meet with staff and other vets in the milieu for an orientation meeting. During the orientation meeting staff will review the program handbook and other relevant information with the veteran.
- Following orientation, the vet will meet with the program nurse for a health and wellness assessment.
- The veteran's coach will schedule an initial Recovery Planning meeting after the vet has completed his/her wellness assessment.
 - The veteran and coach will work together to complete the plan by the veteran's fifth visit to VBR following enrollment.
 - The veteran and his/her coach will meet at least every 6 months to update the Recovery Plan, and will meet regularly between updates.
- Veterans will likely have questions as they begin attending VBR. Please ask questions when you have them. Staff and/or other veteran members can answer questions.

VBR SERVICES, ACTIVITIES AND CLASSES

VBR services include individual services, daily skill building groups, self-directed time to work on goals, workgroups, classes, and trips off CRRC grounds (community integration outings). We emphasize group participation and socialization among veterans. A monthly calendar is available in the group room for members to take home: the calendar lists upcoming activities and should be used to help you plan when you want to be at VBR. The calendar and this handbook are also available online (www.minneapolis.va.gov/services/VBR.asp).

Individual services:

- Each veteran will be matched with a Recovery Coach who will meet with the veteran individually to help him/her develop a Recovery Plan.
 - Veterans are expected to
 - generate their own goals for the Recovery Plan
 - actively pursue recovery by working on Recovery Plan goals at VBR and on his/her own time

- meet regularly with their coach to talk about goals & progress
 - Coaches are expected to assist the veteran with:
 - Clarifying goals
 - Identifying 1-2 goals to serve as the focus of the Recovery Plan
 - Breaking goals down into steps the veteran needs to take in order to achieve goals
 - Identifying resources the veteran may need to achieve goals
 - Identifying personal strengths and barriers to achieving goals
 - Identifying ways to participate more in the veteran's community
 - Veterans will meet with their Recovery Coaches at least every 6 months to update their Recovery Plans and complete required paperwork. They will have additional scheduled check-ins (at least once per month) to review progress toward goals, and can schedule more meetings as needed.
 - Coaches and veterans can meet at the CRRC or in the community.
- Each veteran will meet with the nurse who will do a health and wellness assessment and provide information about health-related resources.

Daily group activities:

- 9a **Community Meeting:** daily goal-setting, announcements, review rehabilitation agreement, awards & transitions, wellness exercise, getting to know other vets. We encourage veterans to bring up subjects they'd like to discuss.
- 10a-12p **Activities and Education:** During this time we offer a variety of activities and groups. Veterans can choose activities that meet their goals, or participate in a pre-planned activity. Examples include volunteering, Skills Classes, and Peer Support.
- 12p-1p **Lunch:** VBR typically does not provide lunch. The multipurpose room is open during the lunch hour. There is a refrigerator available to store your lunch if you bring one from home. Please write your name and the date on your food. All items in the refrigerator will be discarded at the end of each day. If lunch is part of an outing we will indicate on a sign-up sheet to bring your own lunch or money to purchase a lunch. We will also indicate on the monthly calendar any scheduled outings that may involve lunch or a need to bring money.
- 1p-3p **Classes/Activities/Groups:** On some afternoons we offer activity groups and are open to providing additional programming at veteran request.

Classes, additional activities, and interest groups

CLASSES

Community Activity Group: Ongoing group focused on using public transit to explore the Twin Cities. Participants are expected to help choose, plan, and carry out all activities. Participants are also expected to pay their own way (transit fare and admission/activities).

Ending Self-Stigma: Weekly (9 session) class to help people develop skills for challenging negative self-evaluations related to mental health.

Social Skills Training Class : A skill building group designed to help individuals learn and practice specific communication and social skills.

Social Skills Training Activity: Following SST Classes we will apply the learned skills in a variety of community settings such as coffee shops, museums, or libraries.

Coping Skills: A twice weekly group offering education on multiple skills to utilize for coping in a variety of situations. A veteran can expect to learn new skills and share skills with other veterans. Some examples of a variety of covered topics include: *Being Assertive by Making or Refusing Requests, What Makes Us Angry, Recognizing Signs of Anger, Stress Management, Coping with Symptoms, or Making Compromises.*

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Community integration trips: Trips into the community to enhance skills and enjoy some of the Twin Cities' many cultural & recreational offerings are an important part of the VBR mission. Veterans select and plan all community outings.

Volunteerism: Many members are interested in volunteering. We have regular trips focused on providing services to people in need (e.g. serving lunch at Salvation Army, donating garden produce to local food shelves).

INTEREST GROUPS

One way to enhance recovery, meaning and purpose in life is to participate in work. While VBR does not provide paid employment, we do offer opportunities to work in groups with other veterans and staff in a number of areas. Specific interest groups may vary depending on the season and veteran/staff interests and abilities. We encourage veterans to create new groups based upon their interests. Here are examples of past workgroups:

Newsletter group: This group researches, writes, edits and distributes a mental health newsletter.

Ringinɡ Cavaliers: Several veterans and one staff person have joined together to form a bell choir. They practice on Monday mornings (10:00-11:30am) and have begun to perform at the VA and in the community.

OTHER SERVICES AVAILABLE TO VBR MEMBERS

VBR members have access to a variety of mental health services at the Medical Center. Coaches can work with veterans to identify services in the Medical Center that fit veterans' needs and goals, but we defer to the primary mental health team to make referrals. Additional mental health services include but are not limited to:

- Family Education
- Social Skills Training
- CBSST
- Coping with Voices
- Supported Employment
- Wellness, Management, and Recovery
- Balancing Group
- Vocational Services (including supported employment and work therapy)
- Dual Diagnosis groups such as Seeking Safety
- Anger Management
- Educational groups on sleep, anxiety, pain management, anger coping skills, and sexual trauma
- Evidence based therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder
- Medication management
- Individual psychotherapy
- Recreation therapy

PHASES OF PARTICIPATION

During the first few months to one year in VBR, veterans may participate intensively in VBR. This may include daily or near-daily attendance, participation in several educational classes, and enhancement of skills and confidence through participation in the milieu. They should expect to get to know and learn from other veterans in the program. As veterans become more confident in their skills and develop more connections in the community, they may participate less in VBR. Instead, they will begin to apply more of their skills in a setting related to their recovery goals.

For example, veterans may become involved in volunteer work, recreational activities in the community, spiritual communities, or paid employment. As veterans achieve greater community integration they may choose to attend VBR activities occasionally. More advanced veterans in VBR may choose to informally mentor newer members. There is no time limit on participation in VBR as long as the veteran has active recovery goals and is making progress toward those goals. In summary, there are 3-4 general phases of VBR participation:

Phase	Title	Time frame (approximate)	Activities
Trial Period	Pondering your bridge	1 month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend trial period of up to 1 month • Orientation
New Member	Building your bridge	Months 2-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intake • Begin working w/Recovery Coach • Establish Recovery Plan w/goals • Attend community meetings, share goals & steps, get to know peers • Actively participate in classes • Participate in recreation activity • Attend at least twice weekly
Active Member	Crossing your bridge	Months 13-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to meet w/Coach • Actively contribute to groups • Work on self-advocacy • Acquire, develop & maintain new coping skills & strategies • Increased community involvement • Has met some recovery goals • Attend every week • See peers outside of program
Alumni	Maintaining your bridge	Months 24+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has met most recovery goals • Developing, promoting acquired skills • Focused on lapse/relapse prevention • Share recovery story with peers • Consider mentoring newer members • Involved in community activities • May attend VBR less than weekly

BENEFITS/RISKS OF PARTICIPATION

- **Benefits:** Research shows that actively participating in rehabilitation and recovery programs can improve a person's quality of life, social adjustment, ability to cope, knowledge about mental illness, reduce relapses, and reduce hospitalizations (Mueser, 2002). There is also evidence that talking with a peer support worker works well for increasing your sense of personal empowerment (Rogers et. al, 2007).
- Additional benefits include education about resources such as skills classes and local activities. You may better understand your own values and goals as a result of participating in VBR. You will also be encouraged to define your personal vision of recovery.
- VBR staff have noticed that some people who have been in the program for awhile start to talk more, make jokes, socialize with other veterans, teach other vets about the program and activities, encourage each other, and lead parts of meetings. We have noticed that veterans who have been in our program for awhile begin to think of themselves as people who can give back. Several have become or considered becoming peer counselors. People have told staff they feel supported at VBR.
- **Risks:** Being in VBR involves examining your life and making changes. This can result in discomfort because most people find it hard to change. You can cope with such discomfort by reminding yourself it is normal, talking with other veterans and staff about ways to handle the discomfort, and taking small steps toward big changes.
- Sometimes people you love get used to you being a certain way. When you try to make changes, even healthy ones, they may get scared or uncomfortable. They may react differently to you or become upset with you. Usually they just need time to adjust. Talking about their concerns may help. Sometimes people cannot adjust and relationships may change.
- Many veterans have questions about VA compensation benefits. You may call the Veterans Administration at 1-800-827-1000 to speak to a benefits counselor. You may also contact your local veterans' service officer (VSO) to get more information. You can locate a VSO in your county by going to the following website: <http://www.macvso.org/cvso.html>.
- Because we leave VA grounds for trips, there are risks associated with being in the community. You can minimize risk to yourself on trips by using common sense, such as dressing appropriately for the weather and the activity and behaving in a safe, responsible manner. Staff on trips will always carry a cell phone and basic first aid supplies.

VBR REHABILITATION AGREEMENT (CODE OF CONDUCT):

1. We expect you to attend VBR at least twice per week for a full day of programming. Failing to meet this expectation without communicating with staff is grounds for discharge. If you

can't be at VBR during a week because of illness, vacation, or other reasons please call the VBR main number 612-313-3240 and leave a message.

2. We expect you to work on goals and self-improvement during your recovery. Some people work on quitting smoking, learning skills to cope with depression, or social connections. We expect you to share your goals with your coach and others in VBR. You will meet regularly with your coach to problem-solve and discuss your progress.
3. We expect you, as a member of VBR of any status, to refrain from attending programming while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Alcohol and illegal drugs are not allowed on VA property or in VBR. If staff believe you are under the influence during programming we will request a urine drug screen or police administered breathalyzer. Failure to comply with drug screening may result in discharge from the VBR Program.
4. We expect that you will get to know other veterans in the program. We hope that you will find people you can connect with and even make friends. We hope you will use the contact list that members have put together. At the same time, we ask that you observe some boundaries:
 - a. Do not do business or exchange money with other vets in the program or staff.
 - b. Do not have intimate/sexual relationships with other vets in the program or staff.
5. If you smoke while at VBR you must stand 25 feet away from the door to the building and dispose of cigarette butts in the appropriate receptacle. Please do not litter! As a courtesy to your non-smoking peers we ask that you do not smoke during outdoor group activities such as walks, picnics, etc.
6. Please show respect to others while in VBR. VBR includes people from varying backgrounds with their own opinions, values and beliefs. Do not make negative comments based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, status as a veteran, political affiliation, or other personal characteristics. Please turn off your cell phone when you're in group.
7. VBR has zero tolerance for violence, abuse, or weapons. You will be discharged from VBR if you engage in verbal abuse, harassment, physical violence, or threat of violence toward others. You will not be allowed to return to VBR if you have threatened or harmed others. Weapons are not allowed on VA property, the CRRC, or in VBR.
8. Privacy and confidentiality are important. Please do not talk about other vets outside group. This includes their names and what they say in group. Please do not take any photos of group members, staff, or any other identifiable information without asking permission.
9. Hygiene is important for self-care and social connections. Please bathe, brush your teeth and wear clean clothes when you attend VBR. Staff will ask veterans who have not followed these guidelines to leave and come back after they have cleaned up.
10. If you violate the VBR Code of Conduct you may be discharged. Staff will talk with you, remind you of the rules, and work with you to create a plan to safely continue. VBR staff won't discharge you without attempting to talk with you first.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR IN-PROGRAM BEHAVIOR

DRESS CODE

- Casual, clean
- Do not wear clothing with swear words, sexual language, references to drugs or alcohol, or discriminatory remarks of any kind.
- When going on community trips please dress appropriately for the weather and the activity. If you have questions about what is appropriate please discuss with staff and/or other veterans.

SMOKING/TOBACCO STATEMENT

Federal buildings and vehicles are tobacco free. You may not use any kind of tobacco or e-cigarettes while in the CRRC building or in government vehicles. Please do not smoke or discard tobacco-related litter near the doors of the CRRC. Please do not smoke in front of neighboring businesses. You must stand at least 25 feet from the front door of the building while smoking.

CELL PHONE STATEMENT

Please turn off or silence cell phones while in VBR. If you need to make or take a call, please step out into the CRRC vestibule or just outside the building.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

- You must attend VBR at least twice per week. You may attend any day of the week. Please call if you will miss a whole week.
- If you do not attend during a given week and do not call us, a VBR staff member will call you to assess your well-being and satisfaction with the program.
- If you miss 3 weeks in a row you may be discharged from VBR.
 - If you frequently miss weeks, even if you don't miss 3 weeks in a row, you may be discharged. Staff will talk with you before initiating discharge.
- Family members or significant others may attend programming with the veteran's (and the group's) approval. Veterans should discuss this with VBR members and staff in advance. Family members and significant others are expected to abide by the same rules of conduct as VBR members.

SICK POLICY

- Do not come to VBR if you are sick. If you need to see a doctor, call the Primary Care Call Center at 612-467-1100.

- The toll-free number for the Medical Center is 1-866-414-5058, then dial extension 1100 for the Primary Care Call Center.
- If you are sick and need to cancel, please call the CRRC to notify us.
- If you are hospitalized for any reason, please notify VBR (or ask a family member or significant other if you are not able to). VBR staff will not tell other members you are hospitalized unless you give us permission.

DRUG, ALCOHOL AND PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION POLICY

- Do not attend VBR under the influence of drugs or alcohol. We reserve the right to refer you for a drug/alcohol screen if we suspect you are under the influence.
- If the drug screen is positive, the veteran will meet with his/her Recovery Coach and the Program Manager when not under the influence. They will develop a plan so that the veteran may continue to participate in VBR while maintaining sobriety. Violation of this plan or failure to submit a urine drug screen (UDS) and/or a police administered breathalyzer upon request may result in discharge from VBR.
- Prescription and over-the-counter medications may be brought into VBR as long as they are labeled and in the original container or in a medication organizer/pill box with your name on it. Please do not share any medication with other veterans or with staff. Please do not ask anyone else for their medication. Please keep your medications with you at all times.

EMERGENCY CARE, SAFETY AND SECURITY

EMERGENCY CARE

- If there is a life-threatening emergency, please dial 911 immediately and describe the nature of the emergency.
- If a psychiatric emergency occurs during regular business hours, please notify your outpatient mental health providers and/or VBR staff. Staff will assist you with obtaining appropriate care. If staff are not available go directly to the Minneapolis VA Emergency Department.
- If you need psychiatric emergency care after 4:30pm, on weekends or holidays, please call 911, the veterans' crisis hotline (1-800-273-8255), or go to the nearest emergency room. You may also call the Minneapolis VA at 612-725-2000 and ask to speak with the Psychiatrist on Duty (P.O.D.).

- When you arrive at the emergency room tell the person at the check-in desk that you are having a psychiatric crisis and describe your symptoms (e.g. feeling suicidal, homicidal, having hallucinations).
- If you know of another person who is talking about suicide or homicide, or having a psychiatric crisis, please let staff know or call 911.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

- Your safety is important. Please tell us if you observe unsafe conditions or actions.
 - If you see unsafe conditions or actions you can also report them to the Patient Safety Manager at 612-467-3022 or the Patient Representatives at 612-467-2106.
- If an event occurs that requires serious medical attention or police assistance, staff will press one of the emergency buttons or call 911. Staff may also request veteran assistance in pressing the emergency button or calling 911. In the event of an emergency please stay calm and follow staff or police instructions.
- If there is a fire or other emergency, please remain calm and follow staff instructions. You may be asked to evacuate the building via the nearest safe exit or go to a safe area inside the building. Specific emergency procedures are posted in VBR.
- Weapons, drugs, violent behavior, threats, and sexual harassment will not be tolerated at VBR. If a veteran has weapons or drugs, or engages in threats or harassment, s/he will be asked to leave the CRRC immediately. If a veteran refuses to leave, the Minneapolis police will be called and will escort the veteran from VBR to a place that ensures the veteran's and others' safety (for example, the ER or a legal setting). Police methods of maintaining security and escorting veterans may involve restraint. *VBR staff do not practice restraint, nor do they place veterans in seclusion.*
- If a veteran has weapons or drugs at the CRRC, or threatens or harasses others at VBR, the veteran's Recovery Coach and the Program Manager will meet with the veteran when it is safe to do so. They will discuss whether it is safe for the veteran to remain in VBR and what the veteran must do to continue in the program. If a plan to continue in VBR while maintaining safety cannot be developed or is violated, the veteran will be discharged from the program. If the veteran is discharged, VBR staff will attempt to help the veteran identify appropriate alternative services.
- The Patient Behavior Committee at the Minneapolis VA will be notified about the veteran's behavior and a flag may be placed on the veteran's chart informing providers about the history of and/or potential for disruptive behavior.

TRANSPORTATION

- Service-connected veterans can ride public transportation in the Twin Cities for free. Veterans should show their VA identification card to Metro Transit drivers to verify they are service-connected veterans. A brief description of this benefit is available on the Metro Transit website: <http://www.metrotransit.org/fares.aspx>. You can call Metro Transit at 612-373-3333. If you have questions about your ID card you can call 612-467-1991.
- Metro Mobility is also a transportation service you may be eligible for. It is a door-to-door service operated by Metro Transit for individuals who cannot use regular transit. Contact Metro Transit or talk with staff for more information.
- There is a VA shuttle that operates daily from the hospital to the CRRC. The schedule is available at the CRRC front desk.
- Parking is available at no cost to veterans while they are attending appointments at the CRRC. You may park in the parking garage at 11th St. and Harmon Place. Obtain a voucher to pay for parking from CRRC clerks.

TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

- Travel reimbursement is meant to reimburse veterans for the costs of getting needed health care services. If you attend prescheduled appointments, you may be eligible for “round-trip” travel reimbursement. If you attend drop-in appointments, you may be eligible for “one-way” travel reimbursement.
- VBR is primarily a drop-in program, so your appointments here will be eligible for “one-way” reimbursement.

Collection of Travel Reimbursement

- After your VBR appointment ask the front desk staff to “check out” your appointment. This will allow you to request travel reimbursement through use of the Kiosk. The kiosk is located in the front lobby by the reception desk. Requests for travel reimbursement will be processed in about a month and will be direct deposited to your bank account or mailed in check form.
- You may contact Beneficiary Travel at 612-467-1396 for further information on eligibility and reimbursement procedures. You may also visit their office at the Minneapolis Main VA between 0830 – 1600 located at 1S114.

- If you're depending on travel reimbursement for income, talk to your coach. S/He can help you with a budget and/or problem-solving regarding financial resources.
- You are responsible for following national VA travel reimbursement rules. **You CAN be prosecuted, fined, and even imprisoned for wrongly collecting travel reimbursement.**
- If we learn that you are wrongfully collecting travel reimbursement, we will:
 - Not pre-schedule any VBR appointments until the matter is resolved
 - Notify the Patient Family Center that you should not be collecting travel reimbursement
 - **PLEASE NOTE THIS MAY RESULT IN NEGATIVE FINANCIAL AND/OR LEGAL CONSEQUENCES, SO DON'T BREAK THE RULES!!!**

TRANSITIONS AND DISCHARGES

TRANSITION: Ideally, each veteran will determine in collaboration with his/her coach and support system when s/he is ready to transition to senior membership in VBR. When a veteran is ready to transition s/he should notify his/her coach. Staff will work with the veteran to plan a transition that is consistent with his/her needs. Ideally a veteran will work with his/her coach to summarize the goals s/he has accomplished while in VBR, share this summary with the VBR community, and receive a certificate of recognition from the staff and other members. Senior Members are eligible to continue to attend VBR as needed, but are not responsible for regular attendance and completing Recovery Plans. They must still follow other program guidelines.

STAFF-INITIATED DISCHARGE: There may be times when staff will initiate a veteran's discharge from the program. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT VETERANS WILL ALWAYS BE INVOLVED IN THIS PROCESS. In the event of a staff-initiated discharge, staff will present concerns to the veteran orally (and in writing if desired), will document concerns in the medical record, and (if possible and safe) will work with the veteran to develop a plan that will allow the veteran to continue in VBR. The plan will be written down, documented in the medical record, and a copy will be provided to the veteran. The plan will include specific target behaviors to increase and/or decrease, suggestions for meeting behavior targets, responsibilities of the veteran and the staff in carrying out the plan, a timeline for implementation, and consequences of not adhering to the plan.

The following are example reasons a veteran may leave VBR:

- The veteran has met his/her goals (successful discharge or transition).
- The veteran does not attend VBR for 3 weeks and has not initiated contact with staff to discuss his/her absence.
- The veteran does not attend VBR consistently over a prolonged period of time (e.g. in a 3-month period attends once every 2-3 weeks).
- It is unsafe for the veteran to continue to participate (for example, very inappropriate behavior, threats or actual harm to self or others).
- The veteran's goals and needs would be better met in another program and are not appropriate for VBR.
- The veteran attends but makes no effort to participate.
- The veteran no-shows or cancels an appointment, cannot be reached by phone and does not respond to written correspondence.
- The veteran no longer wishes to participate in VBR.
- The veteran refuses to participate in groups.
- The veteran is actively using illegal drugs or misusing prescription medications. Or a veteran diagnosed with any substance use disorder is using alcohol.

If a veteran is discharged from VBR and later wishes to rejoin, s/he may have to wait if the program is full. The veteran may be asked to meet with the Program Manager or his/her Recovery Coach to discuss changes that have occurred since leaving the program. This may include talking about changes in goals, motivation, or safety concerns.

MAKING VBR BETTER (PROVIDING FEEDBACK)

We welcome your feedback about VBR. We want to know what is going well and what needs improvement. You can give feedback in multiple ways:

- If you feel comfortable, please tell staff what you like & what you don't like.
- Please fill out Member Satisfaction Surveys when they are offered.
- Attend the Open Forums to provide feedback and help plan programming for the following month.

COMPLAINTS/GRIEVANCES

Patient Rights and Responsibilities: We encourage all veterans to know their rights and responsibilities when using services at the VA. Brochures outlining patient rights and

responsibilities are included with the intake materials. They are also available in the Patient Family Center (1S-114) at the main hospital. These brochures (“Speak Up”, “Patient Rights and Responsibilities”, “All Veterans and Their Families Have the Right to Request Protective Services”) will be reviewed with you annually with your Recovery Coach during your Recovery Plan update.

All veterans have the right to contact the Patient Representatives at the Patient Family Center. The Patient Family Center is in room 1S-114 of the hospital and their telephone number is 612-467-2106. We encourage you to also use the complaint guidelines below:

VBR COMPLAINT GUIDELINES

Purpose: VBR wants to have a consistent process to handle complaints in a timely, respectful manner. All veterans have the right to voice complaints/concerns in writing or orally without fear of reprisal. Making a complaint will not compromise a veteran’s access to care. Complaints will be received and resolved at the most appropriate level. All complaints will be addressed with sensitivity to the needs of the person making the complaint.

Complaints about VBR staff:

- Talk to the VBR Program Manager if your complaint is about a staff person other than the Program Manager
- The Program Manager will try to work with the veteran and staff member to resolve the problem. The veteran will be notified of actions taken and outcomes within 5 days.
- If the veteran is not satisfied with the outcome s/he may contact the Patient Representatives at 612-467-2106.
- If the complaint is about the Program Manager or if the veteran does not feel comfortable talking with the Program Manager, s/he may contact the Patient Representatives at 612-467-2106.

VBR STAFF CODE OF ETHICS

Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch

General Principles

- Public service is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws and ethical principles above private gain.

- Employees shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
- Employees shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
- An employee shall not, except as permitted by subpart B of this part, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeing official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by the employee's agency, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the employee's duties.
- Employees shall put forth honest effort in the performance of their duties.
- Employees shall not knowingly make unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
- Employees shall not use public office for private gain.
- Employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
- Employees shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
- Employees shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.
- Employees shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
- Employees shall satisfy in good faith their obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those—such as Federal State, or local taxes—that are imposed by law.
- Employees shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.
- Employees shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that they are violating the law or the ethical standards set forth in this part. Whether particular circumstances create an appearance that the law or these standards have been violated

shall be determined from the perspective of a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts.

Additional ethics guidelines for VBR Staff

VBR Staff:

- Consult with and adhere to guidance from Contracting, Fiscal, Compliance, Continuous Improvement, Business Office, Public Affairs, Privacy Officer, Regional Counsel, and other committees and officials when applicable.
- Do not use their official positions to engage in personal fundraising, and do not solicit donations for a particular agency or group in their official capacity.
 - VBR staff may present needs lists and requests for donations to the VBR program at meetings run by Voluntary Services, and may communicate with veterans' groups or other donors in follow-up to such meetings.
- Adhere to procedures for proper witnessing of documents such as research consent forms and advance directives, when applicable.
 - Research consent forms should be signed by witnesses who are not part of the research or VBR team.
 - Advance Directives cannot be witnessed by providers involved in a veteran's care.
- Provide recovery-based mental health services with the maximum application of knowledge, professional skill, competence, and advocacy.
- Undertake continual efforts to maintain their competence in providing recovery-based mental health services.
- Strive, with consent of the Veteran, to include family members and other support systems in the Veteran's care in order to promote recovery and rehabilitation.
- Will discontinue professional relationships with Veterans when it is in the best interest of the Veteran, when such service is no longer required, or in the event that continued service will result in a violation of the Code of Ethics.
- Will promptly notify the Veteran when an interruption in services is anticipated.

- Engages in transition or discharge planning with Veterans, including an appropriate transfer to another professional or service when necessary.
- Do not knowingly harass or demean any persons with whom they interact in their work based on factors such as that person's disability, age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, language, socioeconomic status, or other personal characteristics.
- Strive to create an environment in which staff and veterans are free from abuse, financial or other exploitation, retaliation, humiliation, or neglect.
- Provide an appropriate explanation of their services, consider the Veteran's preferences and best interests, describe therapeutic alternatives and possible risks, and obtain the Veteran's consent to provide treatment.
- Protect confidential information pertaining to Veteran and their care. On rare occasions, VBR staff may have to release confidential information without the Veteran's permission in order to protect the safety of the Veteran and/or others.
- Release confidential information to facilitate treatment goals to providers outside of the VA with permission from the Veteran. VBR staff only access information in the Veteran's medical chart at the VA on a need-to-know basis.
- Maintain electronic medical records of VBR appointments and write notes in compliance with federal, legal, and accreditation-board requirements.
- Refrain from entering into a dual relationship if the dual relationship could reasonably be expected to impair that staff person's competence such as their objectivity, ability to be effective in performing his or her job in the VBR, or otherwise risks exploitation or harm to the Veteran. A dual relationship consists of a staff person having a professional role with a Veteran and at the same time having another role (social, romantic, financial, etc.) with the Veteran.
- Under most circumstances, VBR staff do not except gifts from Veterans. Gifts of small monetary value (under \$10) or perishable items may be acceptable depending on the circumstances.
- If the VBR staff acts on behalf of a Veteran who has been determined legally or financially incompetent, they safeguard the person's interests, rights, and his/her previously expressed choices.

REPORTING ALLEGED ETHICS VIOLATIONS

VBR and the Minneapolis VA Health Care System fully support the reporting of alleged ethics violations. Staff and veterans who report possible ethics violations will be protected from retaliation or reprisal. Reporting a possible ethics violation is not grounds for dismissal from a job or discharge from the VBR program.

How veterans can report possible ethics violations:

1. If a veteran feels comfortable talking to the staff person they suspect of violating the ethics code, they can present their concerns to that individual directly. The staff person is responsible for documenting the concern, responding to the concern within 5 business days, obtaining consultation or supervision as needed, and reporting the concern and action taken to the Program Manager.
2. A veteran may also report possible ethics violations to the Program Manager. The Program Manager is responsible for documenting the concern, responding to the concern within 5 business days, obtaining consultation or supervision as needed, and recording the concern and action taken for tracking purposes.
3. A veteran may also report possible ethics violations to the Patient Family Center. The Patient Family Center is located in room 1S-114. Their telephone number is 612-725-2106. The Patient Family Center keeps track of veteran concerns, and also discusses the concerns with involved staff and their supervisors.

REFERENCES

Mueser, K. T. et. al (2002). Illness management and recovery: a review of the research. Psychiatric Services, 53, 1272-1284.

Rogers, S. et. al (2007). Effects of participation in consumer-operated service program on both personal and organizationally mediated empowerment: results of a multisite study. Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development, 44, 785-799. (Free PDF download)