

For Immediate Release – County of Berks – Press Release

Berks County Veterans Affairs First PA VA Center to Offer On-Site Mental Health Treatment

Reading, PA — 2/12/2025 — A groundbreaking agreement and partnership between Berks County and the federal US Department of Veterans Affairs makes the Berks County Veterans Affairs the first county VA center in Pennsylvania to provide on-site mental health treatment.

Starting this week, qualified Veterans can now make appointments to receive free mental health treatment from a licensed therapist in the new Etchberger Berks County Veterans Service Center located at 20 Commerce Drive in Spring Township.

“We know definitively that when you decrease the time, distance, and money it takes for Veterans to get treatment for trauma, there’s a direct correlation to positive outcomes,” said Jay Ostrich, Director of Berks County Veterans Affairs. “By delivering one-stop access to free, top-shelf therapy and benefits in our backyard, Berks County is now uniquely poised to fight back against the scourge of Veteran suicide and suboptimal living.”

The agreement was endorsed by Berks County’s Board of Commissioners after Ostrich raised concerns and sought solutions over the sharp increase of Berks County Veterans seeking help with mental health.

“We couldn’t be more thankful for the broad-based bipartisan support from our commissioners,” said Ostrich. “This yet another example of Berks County leading from the front by partnering with state and federal agencies to best serve those who have served.”

The agreement was made with the Lancaster Vet Center, a federally funded community-based counseling center that provides a wide range of social and psychological services, including professional counseling to eligible Veterans, service members, including National Guard and Reserve components, and their families.

“We’re thrilled to partner with the Berks County Etchberger Veterans Service Center and join efforts to continue serving the Veterans of Berks County,” said Phillip Grant, Director of Lancaster Vet Center and a Berks County native. “I’m a kid from Reading and a Veteran myself, so this partnership is especially exciting. Having the opportunity to connect with and make a positive impact on my brothers and sisters from Berks County is certainly gratifying.”

Federal Vet Center therapists also provide counseling to make a successful transition from military to civilian life, or after a traumatic event experienced in the military to include military sexual trauma (MST).

Individual, group, marriage, and family counseling are offered in addition to referral and connection to other VA or community benefits and services, said Grant. Vet Center counselors and outreach staff, many of whom are Veterans themselves, are experienced and prepared to discuss the tragedies of war, loss, grief, and transition after trauma.

“So many of our Veterans suffer in silence because they feel treatment is too expensive or not readily available,” said Ostrich. “We just bridged a major gap in getting care and we can’t be more excited.”

Ostrich speaks from experience. As a Combat Veteran from Operation Iraqi Freedom and supporting operations for Operation Enduring Freedom in East Africa, he returned home with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and finally found relief from years of stigma and trauma by confiding with fellow Veterans, and proactively seeking treatment.

“We now have more than 155 years of uniformed military service in Berks County office, and there isn’t much we haven’t experienced directly or don’t know how to improve,” said Ostrich. “There’s no excuse for our Veterans to continuing to suffer in silence – we now have the ways, means and professional mental health personnel on site to help our Berks Veterans go from surviving to thriving.”

The Lancaster Vet Center will have a counselor at The Etchberger Veterans Service Center on Wednesdays, and they welcome both scheduled appointments and walk-ins. Veterans are encouraged to call 717-283-0735 to learn more, or to ask any questions about the program.

#

For more information (*media only*):

Jonathan Heintzman, Public Relations Officer

Office: 610-478-6136 x6112

Cell: 610-507-0063

Email: jheintzman@berkspa.gov