

**VA Caribbean Healthcare System  
United States Virgin Islands  
White Paper**

**IGIA, February 23, 2010**

**Purpose: To provide information** about healthcare services provided to veterans residing in the Virgin Islands of the United States by the VA Caribbean Healthcare System (VACHS).

**Background:**

The Virgin Islands of the United States are an unincorporated, organized territory. They were transferred from Denmark to the United States on March 31, 1917. They are under a Revised Organic Act dated July 22, 1954. These insular areas of the United States are geographically part of the Virgin Islands archipelago, located in the Leeward Islands of the Lesser Antilles. The U.S. Virgin Islands consist of the main islands of Saint Croix, Saint John and Saint Thomas, along with the much smaller but historically distinct Water Island and many other surrounding minor islands. The total land area of the territory is 133.73 square miles (346.4 km.) As of the 2000 census the population was 108,612. Of these 5,152 are veterans.

**Current Situation:**

Veterans seeking health care in the Virgin Islands enter the VA Caribbean Healthcare System, which comprises the main medical center in San Juan, Puerto Rico (San Juan VAMC), outpatient multispecialty clinics in Mayaguez and Ponce and community based outpatient clinics (CBOC's) in Arecibo and Guayama. There is also a rural clinic in Utuado, Puerto Rico. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, the VACHS has outpatient clinics in Saint Thomas and Saint Croix providing primary care. Patients receive care directly from the CBOC's or are referred to community providers in the Virgin Islands ("fee basis"), depending on the type and availability of care needed. Veterans are eligible to have their care authorized by VA and provided in the community for their service connected conditions. In fiscal year 08, outpatient care for Virgin Islands' veterans required a total of \$1,141,062.84. This sum rose to \$1,668,010.65 for fiscal year 09. Most Virgin Islands' veterans come to the San Juan VAMC for specialty care or hospitalization at some point. Round trip airfare is about \$398.00, which is covered by VACHS when authorized. The flight from the Virgin Islands to San Juan is approximately 30-40 minutes. Transportation from the airport to the San Juan VA is provided by VACHS. Hotel

services are made available to those veterans who require overnight accommodations. Prescriptions written by providers in the Virgin Islands are filled by the San Juan VAMC direct mail out pharmacy. The Saint Croix CBOC has a limited pharmacy facility.

**Other Issues:**

Veterans in the Virgin Islands have advocated strongly for their own medical center and cemetery, although they receive full services from VACHS. Most patients and their significant others do not desire to travel to San Juan, Puerto Rico, for services.

Transportation from St John to St Croix or St Thomas is via air or boat. To improve access to care for St John, VACHS is presently seeking to contract for services on the island of St John.