

# CONNECTED CARE STRONG PRACTICES



I recently rode the Long Island Railroad into Manhattan. As the train approached the city, I gazed at the beautiful Manhattan skyline, worry-free. Upon entering Penn Station, I was immediately reminded of the many difficulties that individuals with mobility issues face. Ahead of me on the platform was an elderly gentleman with a rolling walker, trying to balance a bag full of papers while he searched for the elevator. At street level was a man and woman, both with canes, looking very unsteady as they travelled amongst the commuters rushing by.

That night, a young man in a wheelchair rode in my railroad car. The conductor announced that all passengers needed to transfer at the next stop for the connecting train. I watched admiringly as this wheelchair bound individual strategically positioned himself at the train door, and as soon as it opened, skillfully negotiated the gap between the train and platform, to speed ahead to the connecting train. He made it in time and tucked himself into one of the wheelchair spots in the train car.

How easy my life was, I thought. I was able to walk to the connecting train, where I could get into any car, and sit anywhere. I did not need to worry about the gap between the train and the platform, or if the car I entered would be able to accommodate me. So often we take these things for granted.

Kudos to all the mobility impaired people who negotiate public transportation and other practical challenges each day. It is not easy! Telehealth can give Veterans with mobility issues a safe, easily accessible alternative to face-to-face care. It saves them money, time, and stress, allowing care that might otherwise not be possible.

The Tele-Wheelchair Clinic between the Northport VAMC and the Long Island State Veterans Home (LISVH) eliminates the need for unnecessary Veteran travel between the two sites for those with mobility impairments. Kudos to Dr. Christopher Carden (LISVH Physical Therapist), Amie Gorman (VA Occupational Therapist), and Barbara Desmond (VA Prosthetic Representative) for their ongoing collaboration, which makes this possible.

Do you have a State Veterans Home or other community partner you could leverage telehealth with to improve Veteran care?

**-Dr. Cathy Cruise**  
**National Lead for Synchronous Telehealth**  
**Office of Connected Care**

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## Connected Strong Practice: VA Tele-Wheelchair Clinic at Long Island State Veterans Home

### Veteran Testimonials

*"It was absolutely terrific. They [VA staff] asked how I was doing and what I needed. My physical therapist and my wife were there, and we went through the entire thing. Anything I asked for, they were able to provide or explain how we would go about getting it. It was very clear and very precise. The end result is that I don't think we could ask for anything more. It was thoroughly productive. There seemed to be a very nice working relationship between the VA and the State Home – I couldn't ask for anything more."*



- **Mr. John Cassidy, US Marine Corps Veteran**



*"It [Tele-Wheelchair Clinic] was terrific, really. They were so kind, and they spoke so pleasantly and professionally. It was a very nice experience. Everybody was able to say a few words, and I could see everything being done clearly. While we were talking about a particular item, they looked up the possibilities right there with me. It was very well done and made me feel well cared for."*

- **Mr. Werner Ulrich, US Army Veteran**

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## Tele-Wheelchair Clinic Evolution: Process Improvement Based on Veteran Need and Streamlining Access to VA Care

### Original Challenge/Prior Process:



Veteran at Long Island State Veterans Home (LISVH) had a rehab and/or equipment need from the VA interdisciplinary team (PT, OT, PM&R Physician, and Prosthetic Rep)

Veterans traveled from LISVH to the VA facility (approximately 45 minutes one-way)

Travel and time burden caused:

- Disruption in Veteran routines, therapy appts, meals, etc.
- Increased risk of cancellation (e.g., due to bad weather)

### Opportunity:

As many Veterans are transferred from the Northport VAMC to the LISVH, the Northport VAMC PM&R team already works closely with the LISVH team to share information and develop treatment plans for many Veterans.

### Solution:

The Tele-Wheelchair Clinic was established between the Northport VAMC and the LISVH to provide greater access to specialized Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation care to Veterans living at LISVH. Initially, the clinic solely provided evaluation and prescriptions for motorized and custom non-motorized wheelchairs, and as time went on, the LISVH short-term rehabilitation unit grew, expanding the scope of the Tele-Wheelchair Clinic. The Clinic is now held twice per month, as well as ad hoc, to include evaluation and prescription of equipment necessary for Veterans to be safely discharged home from LISVH.



## New/Improved Process:

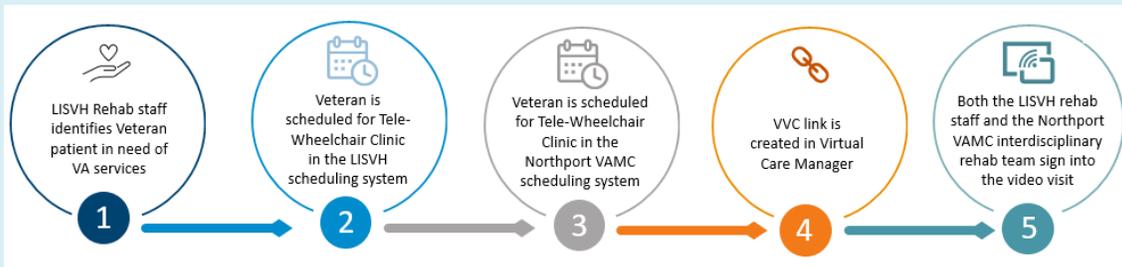
Veteran with VA rehab/equipment need is identified by LISVH staff and scheduled for the VA Tele-Wheelchair Clinic

Pertinent Veteran information is shared electronically in encrypted format

Veteran is seen via VVC into the clinic by the VA Rehab team as telepresented by the LISVH staff

Veteran receives quality, individualized care to meet their rehabilitation needs while being saved travel, time, and effort

## VA Tele-Wheelchair Clinic Workflow:



VAC036963467

VA Video Connect

Change layout

Chris Carden

Desmond, Barbara

Dr. Cathy Cruise

Amie Gorman - OT

*VVC in Action:* This is Dr. Cruise's provider view of the Veteran engaging in his telehealth visit through VVC. He's accompanied by his son at the LISVH facility and Dr. Carden, his PT. Amie, his VA OT and Barbara, the VA Prosthetic Rep are also in the virtual visit providing interdisciplinary expertise.

Veteran Consent Obtained

## Benefits for Veterans, VA Staff and VHA



***“It’s invaluable when it eases the process for the Veteran. They are so grateful, and it makes their stay here more enjoyable.”***

**- Dr. Christopher Carden, PT, DPT**  
Assistant Director of Rehabilitation  
Long Island State Veterans Home

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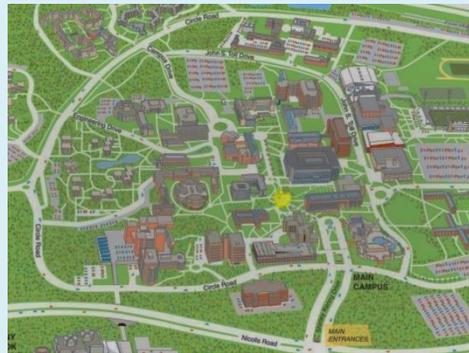
**Clinical Leader Insights: *Leveraging Video to Individualize Veteran Care***

**Dr. Christopher Carden is a Physical Therapist who specializes in geriatric care for both long-term care and short-term rehabilitation. He works for Long Island State Veterans Home, caring for Veteran patients and residents, and partners with VA PM&RS staff to operate the Tele-Wheelchair Clinic.**

**Tell us about the evolution of the Tele-Wheelchair Clinic with VA.**

*We've been open for 30 years and are a part of the Stony Brook University. On campus, we have Stony Brook University, Stony Brook Medical Center, which is a Level 1 Trauma Center, and we have our Long Island State Veterans Home. Our primary goal is to provide long-term care, and we also provide a tremendous amount of short-term rehabilitation to local Veterans with the goal of being discharged back out to the community.*

*Our rehab department is very active for physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language pathology, both for short-term rehab and for long-term care residents. We have a very unique functional operational status as a skilled nursing facility which accepts residents through the VA system because of their VA status and service-related disability. The Federal funds for our Veterans allow them access to whatever durable medical equipment they need to make their lives better – either while they're in our care at the facility or being discharged home back to the community.*



*Close to 25 years ago when this clinic originally started, we would actually transport the Veterans to the Bronx VA, which is close to a 50-mile ride through Nassau County into Manhattan into the Bronx. Needless to say it was a lot of hardship and very difficult transportation for the residents, especially our long-term care residents that are medically complex. In an effort to make things easier on them and easier on the whole process, we switched to a telehealth communication. At first, we just talked over the phone. As you know, technology advanced and access to telehealth improved, so we can use the video telehealth system now.*

**How has the Tele-Wheelchair Clinic enhanced care for Veteran patients?**

*The key component of the video availability is that the VA staff at Northport can visualize and actually see the residents which gives them a better understanding of what their limitations and capabilities are. For example, we can have the resident do a transfer or stand using specific devices so that Dr. Cruise or Amie the occupational*

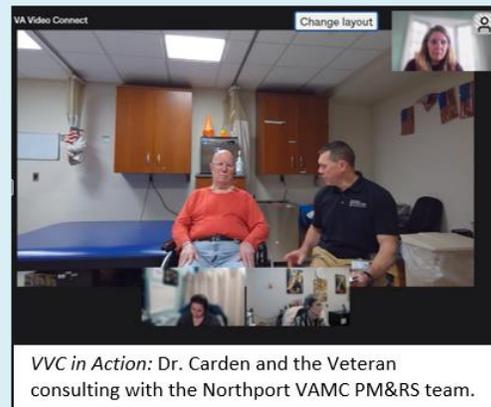
therapist or Megan from the prosthetics and orthotics department can assess why we want a piece of equipment and how it's going to benefit the resident. Following collaboration between our staff and the VA staff, we have a vendor that comes out to do measurements and customization. Then that equipment is funded through the VA. The services are invaluable.

We have the Telehealth Clinic set up on Mondays, and for next week, we have 8 Veterans scheduled. Of those 8, 6 are getting new wheelchairs, customized wheelchairs for their specific needs. Two of them will be able to discharge back to the community with their equipment. **This equipment benefit is sometimes the difference between being discharged back to the community or having to stay in a long-term care facility. And if we can get them back out to their prior living environment with their families, that's 100% a win right there.**



### Can you share some specific rehabilitation needs or use cases that the Tele-Wheelchair clinic addresses?

Things that we get them are any type of durable medical equipment from manual wheelchairs, power wheelchairs, wheelchair cushions, walkers, commodes, ADL [activities of daily living] equipment, feeding equipment, as well as some home modifications like stairlifts within the home or ramps to enter and exit the home. This all makes things more accessible and safer within the Veteran's environment. And another key benefit of the Telehealth Clinic is ongoing equipment maintenance. For example, my patient's power tilt wheelchair had an issue after 2 years, and we were able to video conference to address it and ensure that piece of equipment was at the optimal level for the resident.



We always want our residents functioning at their highest level of independence. It keeps them healthier for a longer duration, prevents the onset of new acute illness, prevents the progression of chronic illness, and keeps them more involved and hands-on in their own care – **they'll have a better quality of life.** That's why it's really key to have access to this specialty equipment that can help people be independent in their mobility.

### What benefits and value have you experienced and witnessed your patients experience from this service?

*Having access to this specialty equipment is invaluable because, as I like to compare, a pair of shoes may look great on the shelf, but you know, until you try them on and test them out, you don't know if it's working out for the need or not. There's nothing worse than ordering a \$10-12,000 custom wheelchair that then doesn't work out. Having access to different pieces of equipment to physically trial with residents prior to ordering is one of the most valuable things.*

*One of the best things that I find about the whole process is that when a resident comes in for long-term care, they're giving up a lot. They're giving up their home in the community and access to their family and loved ones. They're giving up a lot of independence. So being able to get them a piece of equipment that is specialized and customized for them, that helps ease the process of being here. They feel very fortunate to receive the care and services that they do.*



***"I am very passionate about the whole process, and I feel very honored to be part of it. The result that we get out of it is just tremendous."***

- Dr. Christopher Carden,  
PT, DPT

## Resources

- [VA Telehealth Services](#)
- [Geriatrics & Extended Care - State Veterans Homes](#)
- [Long Island State Veterans Home](#)



## Support (technical or programmatic questions)

- Office of Connected Care Help Desk 866-651-3180, available 24/7



This graph of monthly video visits (to home or off-site) demonstrates remarkable sustainment of video telehealth over time (from FY20 to end of FY23).



[OCC Strong Practice Series](#)  
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**VA**



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Connected Care