

KANA Welcomes Veterans for Medical Services

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Kodiak Area Native Association is opening its doors to a new kind of client these days. The organization, which typically only provides services to Alaska Natives and Native Americans, recently added veterans to its clientele.

Rick Epperson is the Rural Health Program Manager for Alaska Veterans Affairs and said the service expansion is the result of a sharing agreement between the VA and KANA.

“Which gives the ability to partner with them and we’re able to purchase care for Native beneficiaries and they also agree to see non Native beneficiaries. And the Alaska VA has the ability to pay that facility for the care, which didn’t exist before.”

Epperson said Kodiak has a rather large population of veterans, and prior to this partnership there weren’t a lot of options for those with medical needs. Many would have to travel to a VA clinic in Anchorage, or use a different service to pay for care.

“The VA has always had the ability to purchase care for veterans in the area, but it was limited in scope. All veterans that are enrolled and eligible for health care are eligible for urgent emergent care wherever they reside, but routine local primary care there’s some beneficiary restrictions that were applied with that. With this sharing agreement, that kind of opens the door in that they’ve agreed to kind of help us out by seeing veterans within the local area whether they’re beneficiaries or not of the Native system.”

He said this isn’t the first partnership between the VA and a Native organization in Alaska. In fact, the VA has about 26 agreements in places ranging from Barrow to Bethel. He said there are only a few VA clinics in the state, mainly along prominent road systems, so the sharing agreements have truly benefited veterans in remote areas.

Roberta Blondin is the front desk supervisor for KANA’s medical department and said folks that are eligible for VA benefits will still need to register to be a KANA patient, but once that is complete they can be seen as many times as their benefits allow. She said veterans can stop by KANA to figure out if they qualify for the new services and the staff will get the process rolling for primary care.

