

Family Home Fund VA Palo Alto Health Care System



*Goal: Construct a Fisher House to Accommodate
Family Members of Veterans and
War Wounded Service Members*

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VA Palo Alto Health Care System - Executive Summary:

Thank you for the opportunity to explain the need for funds to construct a Fisher House (similar to a Ronald McDonald House) at the Veterans [VA] Hospital in Palo Alto. This proposed facility would provide temporary living accommodations for family members of returning service members injured in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts and for the families of the thousands of veterans we serve each year. Many of these families travel long distances to visit their wounded son, brother or father. Most families cannot afford \$150 hotel accommodations in Palo Alto. Families often visit and comfort their loved ones during rehabilitation that requires treatment lasting six months or longer. .

The Veterans Hospital in Palo Alto is one of the largest and most complex medical centers in the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA Palo Alto Health Care System is a major tertiary care referral center with three hospital-based divisions and a network of six outpatient clinics. Our health care system provides primary, secondary and tertiary care within a large geographical region encompassing a 10-county, 13,500 square mile catchment area. Approximately 325,000 veterans reside within VA Palo Alto's primary service area, of which over 80,000 veterans are enrolled in VA health care.

Mission: President Abraham Lincoln's solemn promise – “to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan” – defines the heart of the mission of VA. Our mission statement describes the fundamental purpose of our organization: putting veterans first. VA Palo Alto's primary objective is to serve the veteran through compassionate, innovative, comprehensive, accessible quality patient care in a safe and supportive environment while promoting excellence in research and education.

Over 9,000 soldiers and marines have been wounded in combat in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Facilities in Palo Alto provide mission critical treatment for returning wounded soldiers, sailors and Marines. Treatment is arduous and rehabilitation agonizing.

Additionally, it's important to remember that having someone you love seriously injured is traumatic for the families too and the last thing they need to be worried about is how to pay for a hotel bill. Their families often travel thousands of miles from their homes to Palo Alto to visit these severely injured service members, only to find they have no where to stay.

Budget: Unfortunately, VA does not have statutory authority to provide funding or accommodations for parents, spouses or children. The Fisher Foundation would donate \$1 million dollars if we were able to raise matching funds to build a facility that would solve the problem.

Impact: Your ability to help us raise \$1 million dollars will improve the lives of these families, many of whom have paid a very high price for guaranteeing the freedoms that we cherish today. Your assistance and support would be gratefully appreciated.

Target Population:

VA Palo Alto Health Care System provides many highly specialized programs, all of which would benefit from a Fisher House. These programs, hospice and palliative care, spinal cord injury, organ transplant, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, are critical programs and family members often visit during rehabilitation.

These programs are also regional referral centers, which means that Palo Alto receives patients from the entire West Coast and as far away as Texas.

VA Palo Alto also has one of VA's four traumatic brain injury units in the United States. At any one time there are from 6-12 patients who are undergoing extensive rehabilitation for traumatic brain injury, or TBI, a wound that occurs in more than 60% of veterans who incurred impact injuries in Iraq. These servicemen and women come to the VA after receiving their acute care at Walter Reed, Bethesda or other DoD medical facilities. At VA Palo Alto, they spend hard months in rehabilitation, fighting daily to get their lives back. "Nightline" recently devoted an entire program to a soldier and a Marine injured in Iraq suffering from TBI and being treated at VA Palo Alto.

Other patients include, Raymond Warren, a 22-year-old Marine. He was hit by a grenade and still has shrapnel in his brain that cannot be removed. Doctors were forced to remove part of his skull until the swelling in his brain subsided, and hopefully in a second surgery in December they will be able to complete what is needed. Meanwhile, Cpl. Warren wears a helmet and is making remarkable progress. Jason Poole, 21, was hit by an improvised explosive and lost a portion of his face and skull. He is blind in one eye and struggles even to walk and talk. He's a remarkable young man, and his positive attitude is inspiring to the other service members, as well as staff.

Gunnery Sergeant Kenneth Sargent was blinded and also lost a portion of his skull. His wife, Tonia Sargent, is a wonderful woman who is doing everything she can to bring awareness to the community that there is a need for support for the families of these troops. Many of the families, like herself, live far from Palo Alto and do not have the money to stay in local hotels.

A Fisher House will not only serve families of injured Iraqi service members, but will be there for all veterans' families who have someone they love going through long-term rehabilitation programs, including traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and vision rehabilitation.

Often these injured service members arrive at Palo Alto unable to walk, talk or even perform basic bodily functions. The dedicated team of therapists, doctors, nurses and other caregivers, in conjunction with the amazing attitudes of the men themselves, perform daily miracles. A Fisher House would add immeasurably to the comfort and morale of the troops, and their families. We encourage you to make this a top priority and we want you to know that we're fully committed to doing everything we can to help make this goal a reality.

Project Description:

VA Palo Alto Health Care System was selected as one of five VA facilities to construct a Fisher House, which is similar to a Ronald McDonald House, except the focus is on the veterans. In order to receive matching funds from the Fisher Foundation, VA Palo Alto Health Care System must obtain \$1 million. This is a top priority for VA Palo Alto, its patients, and their families. This project is time critical because family members of returning wounded soldiers do not have accommodations at the VA hospital in Palo Alto and must stay in hotels off site while their loved ones are involved with comprehensive rehabilitation.

The Fisher House program is a unique private-public partnership that supports America's military in their time of need. The program recognizes the special sacrifices of our men and women in uniform and the hardships of military service by meeting a humanitarian need beyond that normally provided by the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.



Because members of the military and their families are stationed worldwide and must often travel great distances for specialized medical care, Fisher House Foundation donates "comfort homes," built on the grounds of major military and VA medical centers. These homes enable family members to be close to a loved one at the most stressful times - during the hospitalization for an unexpected illness, disease, or injury.

There is at least one Fisher House at every major military medical center to assist families in need and to ensure that they are provided with the comforts of home in a supportive environment. Annually, the Fisher House program serves more than 7,000 families, and have made available more than 1,500,000 days of lodging to family members since the program originated in 1990. Based on a comparison of fees at a Fisher House (the average charge is less than \$10 per family per day, with many locations offering rooms at no cost) with commercial lodging facilities in the same area, it is estimated that families have saved nearly \$60 million by staying at a Fisher House since the program began.

Constructing a facility at the VA medical center in Palo Alto will provide accommodations for family members of soldiers wounded in Iraq. The VA does not have the ability to house families and dependants. We as Americans have a fundamental responsibility to provide for those families who have sacrificed so much for our nation. A Fisher House will enable up to 15 families to stay onsite while their loved ones undergo extensive rehabilitation.