

Southern Maryland News

By [Jason Babcock](#) , Staff writer

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced last month it is planning to open 13 new community-based outpatient clinics across nine states, including one in Charlotte Hall.

The outpatient clinics serve veterans who live in more rural areas.

There is a clinic operating now at the campus of the Charlotte Hall Veterans Home. A new clinic will be operational in 2013, said U.S. House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md., 5th). The clinic in Charlotte Hall “that is currently providing Southern Maryland veterans with critical health care services is over-capacity and cannot fully meet the needs of our community,” Hoyer said in a statement. “While the new facility is constructed, there will be no break in services currently provided.”

Former St. Mary’s County commissioner Thomas A. Mattingly Sr. (D) is still a member of the Veterans Regional Advisory Committee of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland.

A 2009 report produced by the group advocated more health care services for veterans closer to where they live and work through an expanded, full-service outpatient clinic. Frequently, Southern Maryland veterans have to make trips to Baltimore or Washington, D.C., for health services.

“We’re really pleased about this” new clinic, Mattingly said. “We ultimately were able to convince the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs] for services down here.”

Connie Walker, retired U.S. Navy captain, who formerly was president of the Maryland chapter

of the National Alliance on Mental Illness and now is serving on the Northeast Wisconsin Veterans Treatment Court, added, "I was real glad to see that." She has been an outspoken advocate for a Southern Maryland clinic and better services for veterans in Maryland since 2005.

Nationwide veterans in more rural areas have to set aside a day to travel to obtain mental, women's and regular health care, Mattingly said.

The current clinic in Charlotte Hall is "supposed to be a full-service clinic — it's very limited," he said.

"Since 1998, the Charlotte Hall Veterans Home has leased out the second floor of a 50-year-old building to serve as the [outpatient clinic] in Southern Maryland. The current facility is small, structurally outdated and the demand for services is rising," the 2009 veterans advisory committee report states.

As more veterans return home from Afghanistan and Iraq, "there'll be even more demand for these services for veterans," Mattingly said. There are still Vietnam veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, he said.

"No veteran operates in a vacuum," Walker said, and there is always need for a variety of services. The Veterans Affairs Department now is starting to open veterans centers, which focus on reintegrating combat veterans into civilian life.

Mattingly said of his continued service on the veterans regional advisory committee, "I told them I wasn't going anywhere until they broke ground on the building."

The Charlotte Hall Veterans Home is the state's only veterans home and has a capacity for 462 live-in patients. But "active duty, Reserve and National Guard members cannot access health-care services provided to [Charlotte Hall Veterans Home] residents," the report notes.

In 2009, there were 330,000 veterans living in Maryland with 39,000 of them living in Southern Maryland, the report states.

The Veterans Affairs Department operates 152 medical centers and 812 community-based outpatient clinics and provides health care to about 6 million patients in a year.