

2023 PCS Annual Report



Overcoming Health Challenges

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Message From The AUSH



**Christopher M.
Saslo DNS,
APRN-BC, FAANP**

**Assistant Under Secretary
for Health for Patient Care
Services/Chief Nursing
Officer, Veterans Health
Administration**

Dear Colleagues and Stakeholders,

It is my privilege to present the 2023 Patient Care Services Annual Report for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Since assuming the role of AUSH-PCS/CNO in October 2022, I have witnessed remarkable strides in enhancing the quality and scope of our health care services.

This year's report highlights our significant achievements in key areas, including Nursing, Social Work, Caregiver Support, Connected Care, Pharmacy, Sterile Processing, Geriatrics and Extended Care, Population Health, Patient-Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, Physician Assistants, and Rehabilitation and Prosthetics. Our dedication to improving Veteran care is evident in every initiative we have undertaken.

During my tenure as AUSH-PCS/CNO, and previously as Acting Senior Advisor, I have focused on integrating comprehensive care strategies that place the Veteran at the center of our healthcare model. The expansion of our Connected Care and Telehealth services is a testament to our commitment to accessibility and innovation.

With more than 37 years of nursing experience and 30 years of service within the VHA, my journey from frontline health care to executive leadership has been driven by a passion for patient-centered care and clinical excellence. This report not only reflects our accomplishments but also sets the path for our future endeavors in providing exemplary care to our nation's heroes.

I extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated staff and stakeholders for their unwavering commitment to our mission. Together, we continue to evolve and meet the diverse needs of those we are honored to serve.

Patient Care Services Leadership



M. Christopher Saslo, DNS, APRN-BC, FAANP
Assistant Under Secretary for Patient Care Services/Nursing Officer

Office of Nursing Services

Jennifer A. Strawn, DNP, RN, NEA-BC
Executive Director, Nursing Services/Deputy Chief Nursing Officer

Deputy Assistant Under Secretary Offices

Antonette Shappell, MD
Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services

Caregiver Support Services

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Executive Director, Caregiver Support Program

Office of Sterile Processing

Alan Bernstein, MS, RN
Executive Director, Sterile Processing

Care Management and Social Work Services

Jill DeBord
Executive Director, Care Management and Social Work

National Center for Ethics in Health Care

Toby Schenfeld, PhD
Executive Director, National Center for Ethics in Health Care

National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

Jane Kim, MD, MPH
Executive Director, Preventive Medicine

Physician Assistant Services

Joel Burroughs, CMSc, MPA, PA-C
Executive Director, Physician Assistant Services

Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services

AJ Patel, MD
Executive Director, Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services

Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services

Maria D. Liorente, MD
Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services

Office of Health Equity

Ernest Moy, MD
Executive Director, Health Equity

Office of Rural Health

Peter Kaboli, MD, MEd
Executive Director, Rural Health

LBGTQ+ Health Program

Michael R. Kaush, PhD
Executive Director, LBGTQ+ Health Program

Office of Whole Health

Benjamin Kilgier, MD, MPH
Executive Director, Office of Patient-Centered Care and Culture Transformation

Public Health National Program Office

Mark Holodny, MD, FACP, FIDSA
Executive Director, Public Health National Program Office and Public Health Substance Laboratory

Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care

Sothe R. Harrison, MD, MBA, FACP
Executive Director, Geriatrics and Extended Care

Pharmacy Benefits Management Services

Thomas Emmendorfer, PharmD
Executive Director, Pharmacy Benefits Management

Health Outcomes and Military Exposure

Patricia R. Hastings, DO, MPH, FACEP, RN
Chief Consultant, Health Outcomes, Military Exposure

Office of Connected Care Accomplishments

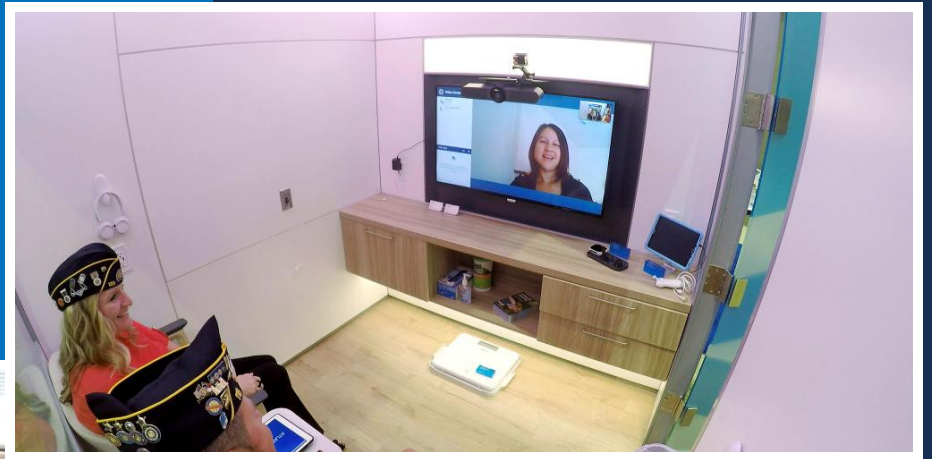
The Office of Connected Care: Bridging the Gap in Veteran Telehealth Services

Introduction:

The Office of Connected Care is at the forefront of revolutionizing health care for Veterans. In 2023, there were unprecedented achievements in telehealth services. With the integration of advanced technology and patient-centered approaches, the office has not only expanded its services but also substantially increased Veteran trust and satisfaction. The Office of Connected Care is steadfast in its mission to deliver comprehensive telehealth services to Veterans since its creation. In 2023, this mission saw remarkable successes, from extending its reach to nearly half of the Veterans served by VA to enhancing access to health care through a significant number of telehealth encounters. The Digital Divide Consult has been a game-changer, providing necessary technology to Veterans in need.

2023 was particularly monumental as it marked the 20th anniversary of two key pillars of Veteran telehealth services: VA Telehealth Services and My HealtheVet. Both initiatives demonstrate VA's commitment to use technology to improve health care outcomes and enhance the Veteran health care experience. As we reflect on these milestones, Office of Connected Care is not only a pioneer but also a beacon of progress in Veteran healthcare.

Air Force Veteran and connected care technician, Mike Nickel loves his job helping Veterans use virtual tools in Nebraska and Western Iowa.



During an open house to meet VA staff and learn about telehealth options, Veterans visit with a telehealth provider in Eureka, Mont.

Office of Connected Care Accomplishments, Cont.



Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations, ATLAS, provide private spaces, equipped with internet access, and the technology needed to meet with VA providers through VA Video Connect, VA's secure videoconferencing app.



Key Achievements:

- Expanded Reach: Provided telehealth services to 2,435,720 unique Veterans, which accounts for approximately 40% of all Veterans served by VA.
- Enhanced Access: Conducted more than 11.6 million telehealth encounters, with more than 9.4 million taking place at the Veterans' homes or other offsite locations.
- Bridging the Digital Divide: Implemented the Digital Divide Consult, assisting Veterans without internet access or proper technology to engage in video visits with VA healthcare providers.
- Successfully completed MORE THAN 149,000 Digital Divide Consults.
- Distributed more than 115,000 loaned 4G tablets to Veterans, ensuring connectivity and access to telehealth services.
- Increasing Trust and Satisfaction: for the third consecutive year, we recorded a consistent increase in Veteran trust and satisfaction with telehealth services, reaching 86.9% and 89.9%, respectively, in 2023.
- Celebrated 20 years of the VA Telehealth Services in May 2023.
- On Veterans Day 2023, My HealthVet observed its 20-year anniversary. This milestone represents years of empowering more than 7 million users with online access to their health information and VA care services.

Health Solutions Accomplishments

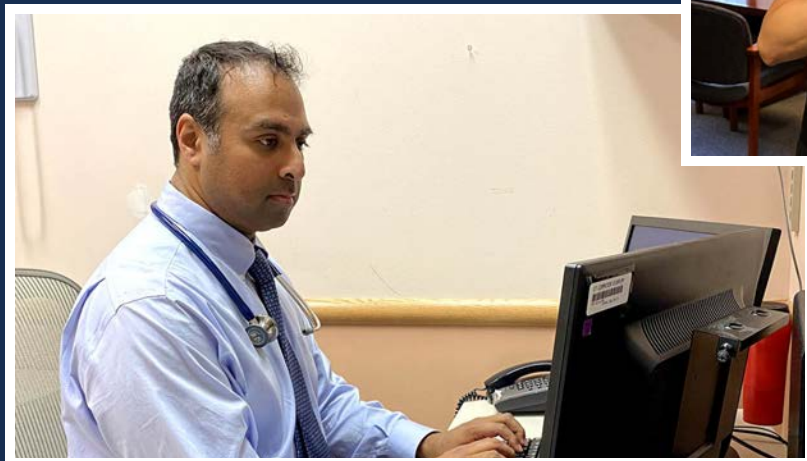
Health Solutions: Innovating Veteran Immunization Data Exchange and Healthcare Management

Introduction:

In the past year, Health Solutions made significant strides in advancing the exchange and management of immunization data for Veterans in collaboration with various state and federal entities. These efforts have streamlined data flow and improved clinical care coordination, ensuring Veterans receive timely and informed care. Health Solutions has diligently worked to bridge the gap between Veterans' health care data and providers, enhancing the delivery of care through technological integration and collaboration.

The deployment of a robust immunization data exchange with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state immunization information systems (IIS) represents a leap forward in public health information sharing. Furthermore, the partnership with the Department of Defense (DoD), United States Coast Guard, and Oracle Health in sustaining and improving the Health Registries/Recommendations software has been pivotal in promoting preventive health measures and managing chronic diseases among Veterans. These initiatives underscore a dynamic approach to health care, prioritizing responsiveness to user input and evolving medical guidelines to optimize the health outcomes of Veterans.

Dr. Reuben Arasaratnam, a staff physician in infectious disease at Dallas VA Medical Center, reviews patient records that list an allergy to penicillin. Determining who may not need to avoid penicillin-based treatments, helps the VA provides the best antibiotic therapy possible to each Veteran. Arasaratnam and his team have been able to remove the penicillin allergy label for a third of the Veterans they've reevaluated.



Executive Director for Preventive Medicine, Dr. Jane Kim and Deputy Chief Consultant for Preventive Medicine, Dr. Sophie Califano received their flu shots during a VA flu clinic.

Health Solutions Accomplishments, Cont.



Key Achievements:

Immunization Data Exchange:

- Launched a VA enterprise-wide immunization data exchange solution with the CDC's Immunization Gateway, and 45 state and jurisdictional IISs.
- Enabled automated electronic exchange for near real-time reporting of administered vaccinations to the CDC Immunization Gateway (IZ) and state/local IISs.
- Facilitated querying of immunization data from the CDC IZ Gateway, integrating state/local IISs' immunization records directly into the provider's view in patients' records.
- By December 2023, more than 4.7 million VA-administered vaccinations through the IZ Gateway to IISs were reported, and upwards of 7.3 million immunization records were received for more than 1.5 million Veterans.

Collaborative Health Management:

- In partnership with DoD, U.S. Coast Guard, and Oracle Health, supervised the maintenance and enhancement of Health Registries/Recommendations, Oracle Health's population health management tool.
- More than 20 prevention and chronic disease registries have been integrated into the new Electronic Health Record (EHR) system to aid providers in delivering recommended preventive screenings and evidence-supported interventions for various chronic conditions.

Continuous Improvement and Innovation:

- Initiated new health measures such as Toxic Exposure Screening to identify Veterans with Military Environmental Exposures.
- We have implemented more than 100 updates to the Recommendations feature, informed by user feedback and adjustments to the medical standard of care. This highlights our commitment to responsive and up-to-date health care provision.

Office of Health Equity Accomplishments

Health Equity: Fostering Inclusion and Reducing Disparities in Veteran Care

Introduction:

The Office of Health Equity (OHE) is a driving force in championing health equity among Veterans, focusing on reducing disparities and fostering an inclusive healthcare environment. With targeted initiatives and strategic funding, OHE made significant headway in identifying and addressing the social determinants of health, enhancing training for health professionals, and improving data-driven health care practices. OHE's concerted efforts in the past year laid a strong foundation for equitable health care delivery across the Veteran community.

By broadening the scope of the Assessing Circumstances & Offering Resources for Needs Initiative (ACORN), we've taken substantial steps to understand and meet the diverse social needs of Veterans. Their proactive outreach to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) not only paves the way for a more inclusive workforce, but also enriches the pool of health care professionals with specialized skills in health equity. Through strategic funding and collaboration, OHE addressed critical disparities in healthcare, particularly for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) Veterans and equipped health care providers with the tools necessary to deliver bias-free, personalized care. With a robust portfolio of educational materials and analytical tools, OHE is not only educating stakeholders but leading by example in the analysis and targeted action in combatting health inequities.



Thanks to planning efforts and construction in 2023, the VHA Office of Health Equity opened the Center for Pacific Islander Veterans Health in Honolulu, Hawaii in June 2024. The CPIVH is a centralized location where health care providers and scientists will coordinate research, data analysis, and practice improvement efforts from all over the Pacific Islands and the United States.

Office of Health Equity Accomplishments, Cont.



Key Achievements:

ACORN Initiative Expansion:

- The ACORN initiative, which identifies and addresses unmet social needs (e.g., food insecurity, social isolation/loneliness, digital access), was extended to 15 of the 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), markedly increasing the scope of social needs screening.
- The number of ACORN screenings in fiscal year 2023 quadrupled compared to the previous year, with approximately 30 VA medical centers screening nearly 6,000 individual Veterans.

Engagement with HBCU Communities:

- Connected with more than 700 students, faculty, and administrators from HBCUs to share VA career opportunities through various presentations and workshops.
- Provided \$57,000 in funding to support six HBCU health profession students in a comprehensive one-year VA training program, incorporating specialized health equity training and practical experience with VA clinicians.

Clinical Health Equity Enhancement:

- Funded and coordinated equity-guided quality improvement projects aimed at reducing racial, ethnic, and geographic disparities in medication adherence and use.
- Played a crucial role in organizational efforts to eliminate algorithmic bias in clinical decision support tools.

Support for NHPI Veterans:

- Allocated \$195,000 to create a health center dedicated to Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islander (NHPIUSAPI) Veterans.
- Selected and funded five pilot project proposals aimed at Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander- Veteran populations, leading a community of practice to enhance research, data collection, and quality improvement efforts for these communities.

Educational Outreach and Resources:

- Published 17 informative briefs and inaugurated a virtual health equity art gallery.
- Hosted eight web seminars and 12 virtual community practice sessions, reaching more than 150,000 email subscribers and 116,716 individual VA Health staff and Veterans
- We expanded the reach of OHE's podcast series to an international audience, including the UK, Canada, Europe, and all 50 states, Puerto Rico and Guam.

LGBTQ+ Health Program Accomplishments



LGBTQ+ Health: Enhancing Care and Dignity within the VA System

Introduction:

This year, the office of LGBTQ+ Health took significant and proactive steps to enhance the health care experience for LGBTQ+ Veterans. Through technological upgrades and educational initiatives, LGBTQ+ Health has made it possible to better understand and address the unique health disparities faced by this community. Recognizing the importance of respect and dignity, the office also engaged in efforts to foster a more inclusive environment for Veterans and VA employees.

In a landmark push for inclusivity and health equity, the Office of Patient Care Services bolstered its systems and training to ensure that LGBTQ+ Veterans receive care that acknowledges and respects their identities by incorporating essential identity markers into health records and providing access to this option through VA.gov. In addition, LGBTQ+ Health laid the groundwork for more equitable health care delivery. The deployment of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) data dashboards represent a commitment to data-driven care, tailoring services to meet the nuanced needs of LGBTQ+ Veterans. The closure of the Government Accountability Office 16- 20 report on Data needed to assess the Health Outcomes of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Veterans demonstrates VA's dedication to continuous improvement and responsiveness to the needs of LGBTQ+ Veterans. Moreover, the LGBTQ+ Health office's efforts to combat harassment and the expansive reach of its training and outreach programs reflect a solid recommitment to the dignity and respect of all those it serves.

Equitable. Inclusive. Respectful.

The care you deserve. VA is here to serve the Veteran you are.



Pride Counts at VA



LGBTQ+ Health Program Accomplishments, Cont.

Key Achievements:

Inclusive Health Records:

- Implemented fields for sexual orientation, gender identity, and chosen name in patient records, allowing Veterans to self-identify and enter this information via VA.gov.
- Enabled the identification of health disparities for LGBTQ+ Veterans based on their self-identified sexual orientation and gender identity, enhancing personalized care when these fields are completed.

SOGI Data Dashboards:

- Launched Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) data dashboards, empowering facilities to analyze and address the specific health needs of LGBTQ+ Veterans under their care.

Care Coordination Tracking:

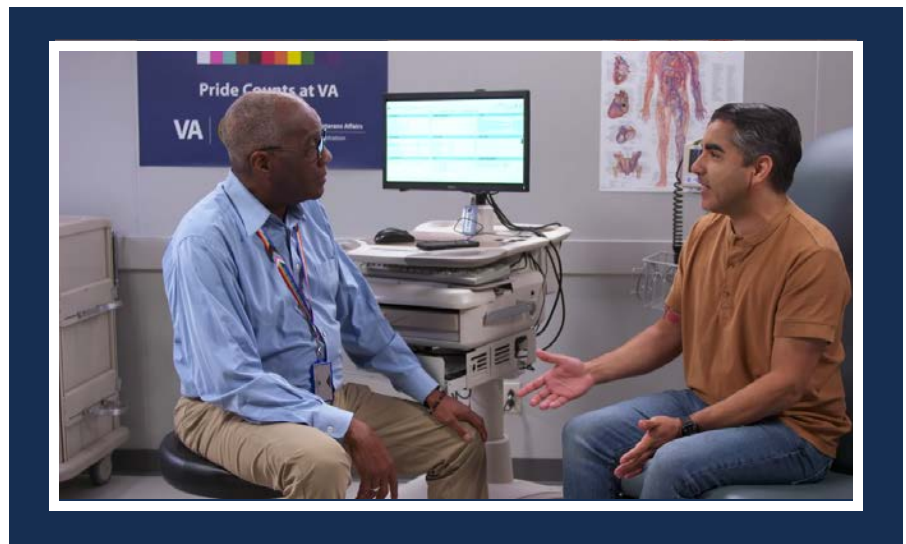
- Established standardized notes and CHAR4 codes to effectively track the activities of LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinators, ensuring accountability and focused care efforts.

Harassment Prevention Task Force:

- Co-led an Integrated Project Team dedicated to Recommitting Dignity and Respect for LGBTQ+ Veterans and Employees, specifically aimed at curbing experiences of harassment.

Education and Outreach:

- Delivered optional training to more than 26,000 VA employees, enriching their understanding and capacity to compassionately and competently serve LGBTQ+ Veterans.
- Reached more than 31,000 Veterans, caregivers, and members of the public with critical LGBTQ+ health information, promoting awareness and support.



Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation Accomplishments



Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation (PCCCT): Championing Holistic Health in Veteran Care

Introduction:

The Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation (PCCCT) is committed to revolutionizing Veteran care by implementing the VA Whole Health approach. This paradigm shift focuses on empowering Veterans to take control of their health and well-being, emphasizing what is important to them, rather than solely what ails them.

PCCCT's dedication to supporting Veterans, their caregivers, and survivors is central to VA's priorities. The PCCCT has made significant strides in transforming VA health care into a more Veteran-centric model. Through the Whole Health initiative, Veterans are provided with comprehensive care that aligns with their personal health goals and life aspirations. The increased uptake of Whole Health services and Tele-Whole Health encounters underscore the success of this initiative. PCCCT's commitment to the well-being of both patients and staff is reflected in its efforts to mitigate clinician burnout and promote a healthy work culture. By recognizing and acting upon the unique health care needs of Veterans, PCCCT is not only responding to current demands but also shaping the future of Veteran health care, positioning it as a benchmark for health systems across the nation.



Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation Accomplishments, Cont.



Key Achievements:

Whole Health Embracement:

- Integrated Whole Health services into the lives 1.8 million Veterans receiving VA care, facilitating 6,293,565 Whole Health encounters in FY23.
- Tele-Whole Health services reached 135,547 unique Veterans, resulting in 663,263 encounters.

Clinical Outcomes:

- Research showed a significant decrease of 30% in invasive spine procedures for Veterans with chronic low back pain participating in Whole Health programs.

Workforce Well-Being:

- Prioritized Employee Well-Being to address clinician burnout, with 70% of clinicians at VA medical centers engaging in Whole Health initiatives in 2023.
- Integrated new well-being metrics into the VHA All Employee Survey, linking higher well-being scores to decreased burnout and turnover and more favorable workplace ratings.

Education and Training:

- Conducted Whole Health training for 11,924 employees, with 52,767 additional employees viewing a new orientation video.
- Recorded an increase in Whole Health training completions, with 88,245 completions in FY23.

National Recognition:

- The PCCCT's Whole Health approach has been recognized by the U.S. Surgeon General and the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine as a model for national healthcare delivery.

Vision and Mission Focus:

- PCCCT's vision is centered on maximizing Veterans' functional independence and their successful reintegration into the community through comprehensive rehabilitation services and cutting-edge technology.
- The mission is to honor Veterans by providing exceptional services that restore, preserve, and enhance their health and independence.

Enhancing Access to Care:

- Successfully expanded on-station chiropractic services, now offered by 10 of the 18 VISNs at more than 75% of their VAMCs.
 - Demonstrated that Veterans receiving chiropractic care for low back pain are 25% less likely to be prescribed opioids.
-

Office of Nursing Services Accomplishments

Office of Nursing Services: Advancing Nursing Excellence and Veteran Care

Introduction:

The Office of Nursing Services (ONS) has played a pivotal role in elevating the standard of care for Veterans by operationalizing the VHA Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan (NWSP). ONS is instrumental in fortifying the nursing workforce, directly contributing to the improved health outcomes of Veterans. Through strategic planning and the implementation of innovative recruitment and retention tools, ONS ensures that Veterans are connected to the soonest and best care available.

The Office's response to military environmental exposures and its efforts to promote high reliability in health care demonstrate a steadfast commitment to Veteran health and safety. By embedding Whole Health principles into nursing practices and addressing the critical issue of Veteran suicide through comprehensive training, ONS displays its dedication to the well-being of Veterans, caregivers, and survivors. The recognitions received by VHA facilities reflect the high standards of excellence ONS has set, showcasing the VA's leadership in nursing and healthcare delivery.



Veterans Health Administration Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer. M. Christopher Saslo smiles with staff at the Palo Alto VA Medical Center in Calif. during a site visit.

Office of Nursing Services Accomplishments, Cont.



Key Achievements:

Strategic Workforce Enhancement:

- Successfully operationalized the VHA NWSP, focusing on maintaining a robust nursing workforce to meet VA's four statutory missions.
- Increased VHA nurse staffing by 7.7% in FY23, bringing the total nursing workforce to 119,388.

Competitive Hiring Initiatives:

- Developed the "3R" Toolkit (recruitment, retention, relocation), which supported hiring more than 8,580 additional nursing staff. Enhanced pre-licensure and new graduate hiring pathways, resulting in a 44.8% increase in RN Transition to Practice program (TTP) graduates being hired. The TTP is a comprehensive 12-month standardized curriculum designed to assist the post-graduate nurse in transitioning from entry-level, advanced beginner nurse to competent professional RN. This program is built upon standards related to clinical experience, leadership, and professional dimensions and includes Veteran-centric content.

Enhanced Veteran Care Access:

- The ONS Travel Corps filled critical staffing needs with 75 travel nurses contributing more than 145,469 hours.
- Developed a deployment plan for the Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management framework in partnership with VHA's Office of Care Management & Social Work.

Military Environmental Exposure Response:

- Conducted 4.1 million unique Veteran Toxic Exposure Screenings in support of the PACT Act.

High Reliability Journey:

- Established Chief Nursing Officers in 83% of VISNs.
- Launched an Evidence-Based Practice Scholar pilot program, empowering bedside nurses with time to implement evidence-based practices.
- Achieved a 29% reduction in non-ventilator hospital-acquired pneumonia in reporting facilities.

Whole Health and Well-Being Focus:

- Integrated burnout and Whole Health training at the Nurse Manager Academy with 456 participants.
- Hosted 'Mindful Mondays' and other whole health activities with more than 3,000 attendees.
- Our efforts have been recognized by the American Nurses Credentialing Center, with 12 VHA facilities achieving the Pathway to Excellence® designation and three being recognized as Magnet® facilities. These recognitions have helped us in attracting and retaining talented professionals.

Suicide Prevention Initiatives:

- Developed national education and training products focusing on suicide prevention.
 - Revised policies and SOPs to expand training on gatekeeper skills, lethal means safety, and managing disruptive behaviors.
-

Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care Accomplishments



Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care: Advancing Care for Elderly and Disabled Veterans

Introduction:

The Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care (GEC) made significant strides in enhancing the services and care provided to elderly and disabled Veterans. The Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care has been at the vanguard of improving and adapting care for elderly and disabled Veterans. Through meticulous legislative work, GEC has laid the groundwork for more inclusive and comprehensive care eligibility, ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder access to necessary services.

The expansion of the Veteran Directed Care Program embodies VA's commitment to honoring Veterans' choices and independence in their care journeys. By utilizing advanced data analytics and feedback mechanisms, GEC has honed its oversight and quality improvement processes, enhancing the State Veterans Homes partnership by delivering care that meets the highest standards. Moreover, the office's dedication to fostering age-friendly health systems and ensuring the quality of palliative and hospice care services highlights the VA's resolve to deliver exceptional care that resonates with the needs and preferences of Veterans and their families.



After Army Veteran David Jedrzejewski had a stroke and lost mobility, he joined other Veterans to help construct and plant garden beds under the guidance of Recreation Therapy at Robley Rex VA in Louisville, Kentucky . Exercise, better sleep, sunshine and connection are just some of the benefits of gardening

Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care Accomplishments, Cont.



Key Achievements:

Legislative Progress:

- Successfully navigated the publication of a proposed rule for determining eligibility for domiciliary care, AR61 proposed rule on Sept. 1, 2023, which allows waivers for Veterans requiring assistance with activities of daily living and amends Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations Parts 17 and 51. This change facilitates eligibility determinations beyond financial means.
- Ensured the implementation of correcting payments under state home care agreements for nursing home care in line with the Government Accountability Report 21-69 (2020) in 2023. This implementation amended the payment calculations for State Veteran Homes under State Home Care Agreements and enhanced the financial management of nursing home care for service-connected Veterans.

Veteran Directed Care Program Expansion:

- Committed to the full implementation of the Veteran Directed Care Program across all VA medical centers by the end of 2023, in line with Executive Order O14095 Increasing Access to High-Quality Care and Supporting Caregivers providing elderly and disabled Veterans with increased autonomy over their home care services.

Enhanced Oversight and Quality Management:

- In the 2023 response to the GAO 21-69 report, they developed the Power BI State Veterans Homes Survey Program Dashboard with VHA staff, improving the oversight and analysis of State Veterans Homes care quality.

Support for State Veterans Homes:

- Approved funding totaling \$4.4M for 47 State Veterans Homes in 16 states for the 2023 fiscal year, aimed at promoting the hiring and retention of nurses.

Age-Friendly Health Systems Initiative:

- Recognized 293 care teams from 131 VA facilities as participants in the Age-Friendly Health Systems movement.
- Registered nearly 800 clinicians from 387 care teams across 123 VA facilities for the FY24 VA Age-Friendly Action Community.

Palliative and Hospice Care Quality:

- Leveraged the findings of the Bereaved Family Survey to collaborate with VISN teams on quality improvement efforts. This resulted in a 79% "top-notch" rating for inpatient end-of-life care through September 2023, the highest national average in the survey's history.

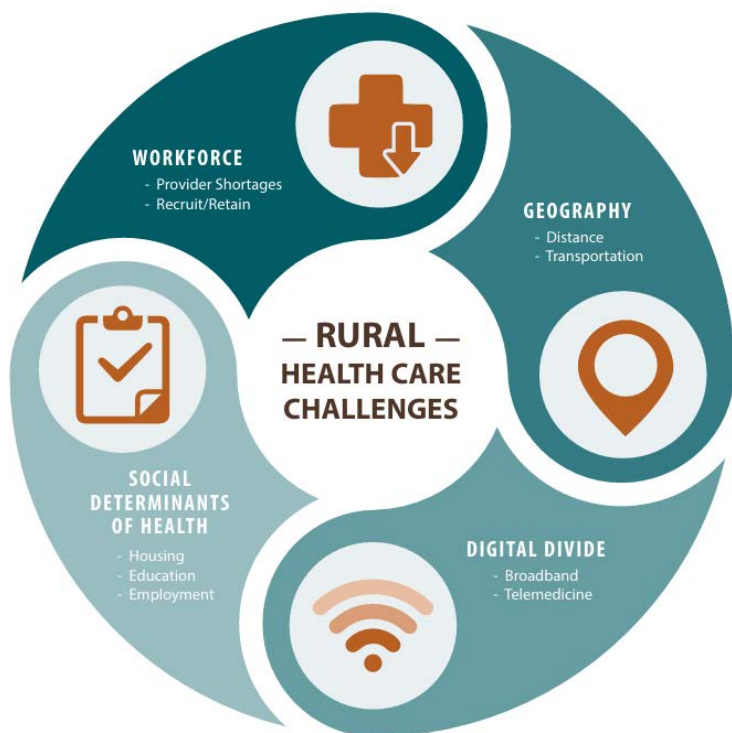
Office of Rural Health Accomplishments

Office of Rural Health: Enhancing Healthcare for Rural Veterans

Introduction:

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) is dedicated to addressing the unique healthcare challenges faced by Veterans living in rural communities. With a focus on innovative solutions and strategic planning, the ORH has made significant headway in improving access and quality of care for the Nation's 4.4 million rural Veterans. ORH has been instrumental in pioneering approaches that tackle the distinctive challenges of delivering health care in rural areas. The publication of the Rural Health Access Guidebook marks a significant step in equipping VA employees with the knowledge to serve rural Veterans better.

Through robust support for innovative initiatives and the strategic enhancement of care services, ORH has broadened the scope of healthcare accessibility for rural Veterans. The office's proactive stance in engaging with congressional leaders has resulted in increased funding to address transportation barriers, which is a pivotal aspect of access to care. Strategic alignment with VA's broader goals ensures that the ORH's efforts are both effective and sustainable, offering a tailored response to the needs of rural Veterans. Hosting the Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee meeting in Anchorage was a strategic move that emphasized the ORH's commitment to understanding and addressing the unique circumstances of rural Veterans across the entire nation. *Photo caption needed



Office of Rural Health Accomplishments, Cont.

Key Achievements

Rural Health Access Guidebook:

- VA employees can now use the guidebook to better understand and overcome barriers to care in rural communities.

Innovative Care Initiatives:

- Supported the spread of 36 Enterprise-wide Initiatives and eight Rural Promising Practices, introducing novel care delivery models to enhance the well-being of rural Veterans.

Rural Recruitment and Retention Plan:

- Collaborated with VHA Workforce Management and Consulting to develop a plan aimed at improving staffing levels across all rural VA facilities.

Expanding Care Delivery:

- Enhanced the provision of mental health, cardiology, audiology, dermatology, and rehabilitation services to rural Veterans through Clinical Resource Hubs and telehealth.

Congressional Engagement and Funding:

- Delivered in-depth analysis of rural transportation challenges to Congress, contributing to an additional \$4.9 million in funding for the Highly Rural Transportation Grant.

Strategic Alignment and Planning:

- Engaged with VA Strategic Planning Office for briefings on VHA Long-Range and VA Strategic Plans, leading to the development of the ORH's strategic goals and objectives for FY2025-2029.
- Formed internal workgroups to establish and report on key performance indicators in alignment with the needs of rural Veterans.

Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee Meeting:

- Hosted the first committee meeting outside the contiguous United States in Anchorage, providing participants with firsthand insights into the access barriers experienced by rural Veterans.



Health Outcomes and Military Exposure Accomplishments

VA

Health Outcomes & Military Exposures (HOME): Leading VA Research and Care for Veterans with Environmental Exposures

Introduction:

The Health Outcomes & Military Exposures (HOME) office is essential in advancing the understanding and treatment of health conditions related to military environmental exposures. The HOME office diligently worked to address the critical issue of military environmental exposures among Veterans. By conducting essential research, engaging with the Veteran community, and implementing new care models, HOME has become a cornerstone in the effort to provide Veterans with the care and resources they need. The office's initiatives—from the extensive analysis of environmental exposure impacts to the deployment of telehealth services—show a deep commitment to improving health outcomes for Veterans.

Additionally, HOME's educational programs and symposiums reflect its dedication to equipping health care providers with the knowledge to offer specialized care. The recognition of HOME staff for their service highlights the meaningful impact of their work on Veterans' lives and the broader mission of the VA to serve those who have served.



The new PACT Act

- » Expands toxic-exposed Veterans access to VA care
- » Extends health care eligibility for Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 era combat Veterans
- » Adds new presumptive conditions for radiation, Agent Orange, Gulf War toxins, and burn pit exposures

EXPANDED VA CARE & BENEFITS

Learn more at [VA.gov](https://www.va.gov)
1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411)



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Health Outcomes and Military Exposure Accomplishments, Cont.

MILITARY EXPOSURES & YOUR HEALTH



Key Achievements:

Community Engagement and Reporting:

- Conducted the first K2 Veteran community forum and completed morbidity/mortality analyses as mandated by Congress.
- Finalized Congressional House Resolution 3967's Section 502 on Congressionally Mandated Report Analysis for treatments on medical conditions related to toxic exposure.

Legislative and Interagency Collaboration:

- Completed multiple mandated reports on Veteran health concerning military exposures and set up collaborations to support ongoing research and epidemiological studies.

Veteran Directed Care and Telehealth Innovations:

- Aiming for nationwide implementation of the Veteran Directed Care Program, offering more choice to disabled and elderly Veterans.
- Launched VET-HOME, the first VA telehealth hub providing national clinical evaluations, with initial operations offering Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry evaluations.

Epidemiology and Research:

- Established the Surveillance Military Environmental Exposures (SMEE) organization, enhancing rapid response research capabilities.
- Formed the Exposure Science Program (ESP) to assess various occupational and environmental exposures and conduct related research.

Specialized Networks and Centers:

- Created the Women's Operational Military Exposure Network (WOMEN) by War-Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) Palo Alto, California, focusing on the health needs of female Veterans.
- Established the Complex Environmental Threats Center (CETC) by WRIISC Washington, DC, to address chemical weapons exposures and emerging health threats.

Health Outcomes and Military Exposure Accomplishments, Cont.

Key Achievements, Cont.:

Public Engagement and Policy Development:

- Launched a public website for environmental exposure research and held virtual listening sessions to gather public feedback on the assessment of medical conditions related to military environmental exposures.
- Added Parkinson's disease to the list of conditions covered under the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program (CLFMP).

Training and Certification:

- HOME's new level 1 certification in military exposures was completed by 798 individuals and the level 2 certification was created in FY23 and launched November 1, 2023.
- HOME, in collaboration with the Veteran Engagement Office (VEO), initiated a VSignals survey on military environmental exposure care for Veterans in July 2023. The survey aims to assess the level of trust Veterans have in the VA to provide care for military environmental exposures. The results of this survey will help HOME to ensure that their education initiatives are effectively improving the experience of Veterans with VA care.

Conferences and Publications:

- Led a symposium on Military Environmental Exposures at the American College of Occupational and Environmental Exposures and presented research at various national and international conferences.
- HOME, WRIISC, and the Baltimore Center on Depleted Uranium and Metal Exposures published 23 scientific manuscripts and conducted 9 funded research grants.



The new PACT Act

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- » Extends health care eligibility for Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 era combat Veterans
- » Adds new presumptive conditions for radiation, Agent Orange, Gulf War toxins, and burn pit exposures

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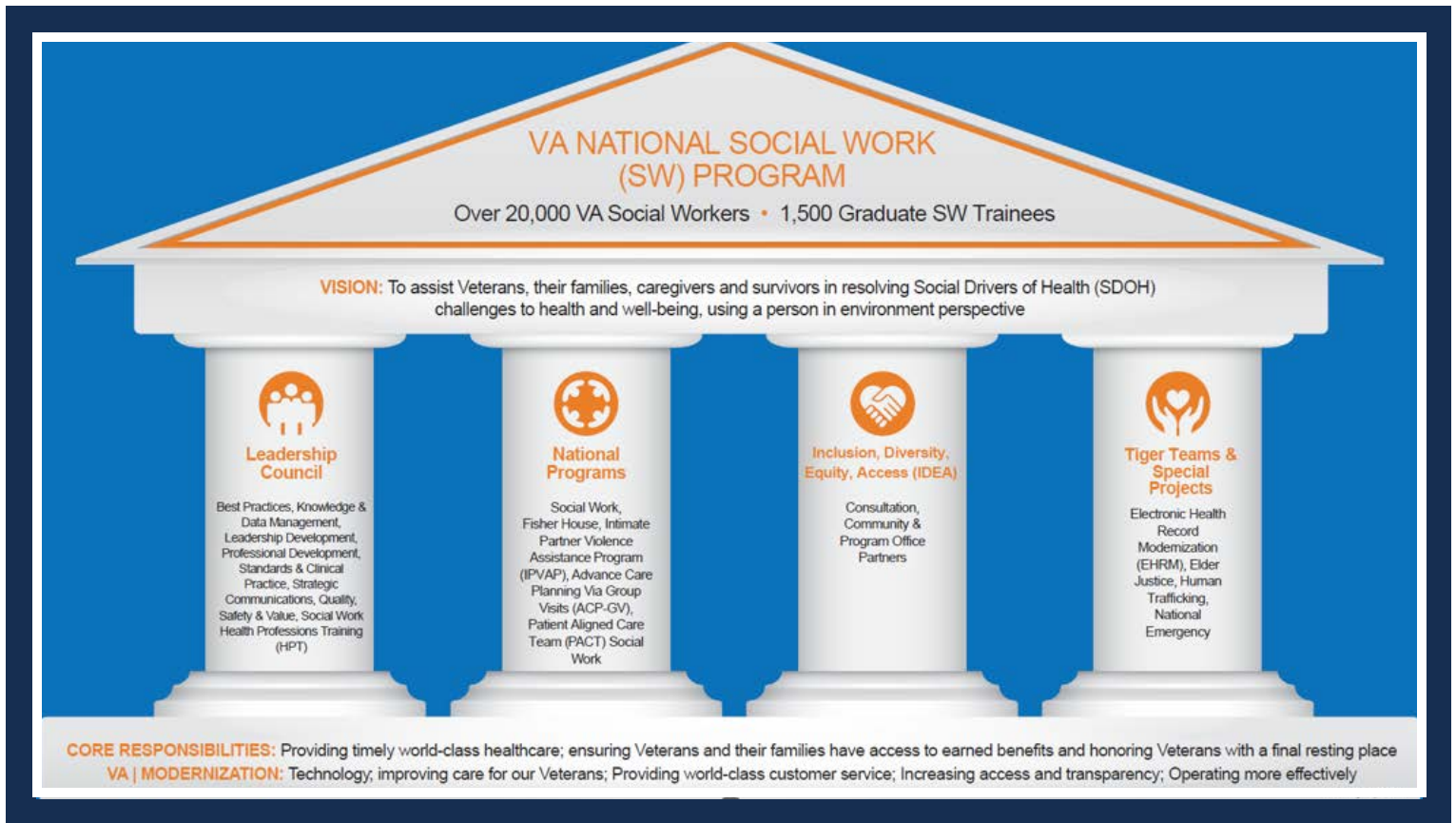
Care Management & Social Work Services Accomplishments

Care Management and Social Work Services (CMSW): Delivering Comprehensive Support and Enhancing Veteran Care

Introduction:

Care Management and Social Work Services within VA has had a profound impact on providing comprehensive care and support to Veterans and their families. Their programs have provided essential services, from transitional care management to intimate partner violence support, reflecting a commitment to addressing the diverse needs of the Veteran community.

Through strategic partnerships and innovative pilot programs, CMSW successfully expanded access to care, particularly for transitioning service members and those facing complex health and social challenges. The implementation of the Medal of Honor Recipient (MOH) Pilot Program and initiatives like the Social Work PACT Staffing Program demonstrate a dedication to recognizing the valor of service members while also ensuring their health care and social support needs are met with excellence. CMSW's ongoing efforts and successful outcomes underscore their role in contributing to the overarching mission of providing comprehensive and compassionate care to those who have served.



Care Management & Social Work Services Accomplishments, Cont.

Key Achievements:

Fisher House and Family Hospitality:

- Hosted more than 26,268 families at VA Fisher Houses, saving participating Veterans [GGT((1) an estimated \$21 million in lodging expenses. Maintained an average Veteran family stay duration of 5.4 days, providing critical support during medical care.

Transition and Care Management Programs:

- Strengthened partnerships with Avalon Action Alliance and the Wounded Warrior Project's Warrior Care Network to expand services at nine sites.
- Established access to VA healthcare for more than 1,030 Veterans in FY23 through these collaborations.

VA Liaison Program Expansion:

- VA Liaisons for Health Care provided services to transitioning service members from 177 DoD installations in FY23, increasing the reach of the VA Liaison Program by 556% since FY20.
- Partnered with the Post-9/11 Military2VA Case Management Program to transition more than 15,270 service members and newly separated Veterans into VA health care in FY23.

Veteran Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) Funding and ROI:

- VERA is a funding model that provides approximately 90% of the allocated operating funds to each Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC). Every patient that is seen at a VAMC is assigned to a patient classification based on the type and amount of care received.
- Generated more than \$107 million in Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation, significantly surpassing the program's operational cost by more than 1,500%.

Medal of Honor Recipient Pilot Program:

- Launched by the National Social Work Program in partnership with the Office of Client Relations, reaching 87% [GGT((4) of MOH Recipients with outreach and education.
- Resulted in 11 MOH Recipients receiving care through VHA, enhancing their access to various programs.



Care Management & Social Work Services Accomplishments, Cont.

Key Achievements, Cont.:

Survivors Assistance and Memorial Support (SAMS):

In May 2023, the Under Secretary for Health directed CMSW to create a decedent affairs sub-office. An integrated project team chartered to support program implementation and transition concluded in September 2023, resulting in more than 30 deliverables, such as process maps, job aids, and change management communications.

Integrated Case Management:

- Launched a pilot with 12 selected sites to integrate Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management/Integrated Veteran Care focusing on moderate/complex Veterans.

Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program:

- Concluded a two-year pilot at 10 VA healthcare systems addressing intimate partner violence and sexual assault, serving more than 22,000 impacted Veterans.

Social Work PACT Staffing Program:

- Implemented the PACT Staffing Program which aimed to improve healthcare access for Veterans in rural areas. A total of 58 sites were completed, resulting in 37,406 encounters with 24,137 individual Veterans. Of this population, 66% lived in rural or highly rural catchment areas. The program was successful in increasing access to care related to social determinants and drivers of health by 16%. This was achieved through the provision of high-quality clinical social work comprehensive assessment, intervention, and follow-up services.

Social Determinants/Drivers of Health Pilot:

- Screened 5,897 Veterans at 26 VA medical centers for social determinants/drivers of health, focusing on women and historically underserved Veterans.



Office of Pharmacy Benefits Management Accomplishments

Office of Pharmacy Benefits Management Services (PBM): Maximizing Resources and Enhancing Veteran Care

Introduction:

The Office of Pharmacy Benefits Management Services is integral in maximizing healthcare resources and improving the delivery of pharmaceutical care to Veterans. PBM demonstrates a keen ability to not only realize significant cost savings but also to direct these funds back into patient care, thereby enhancing the quality of service provided to Veterans. The distribution of essential antivirals during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates PBM's role in executing mission-critical healthcare initiatives. Their foresight in expanding the role of Clinical Pharmacist Practitioners (CPPs) is vital in ensuring that Veterans receive personalized and effective medication management services. Furthermore, PBM's commitment to staying at the forefront of pharmaceutical science is evident in its support for integrating pharmacogenomics into everyday clinical practice.

This endeavor promises to tailor medication therapies to the genetic makeup of individual Veterans. By revising standards for pharmacy technicians, PBM addresses workforce needs while advancing the profession. The Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy's (CMOP) impressive distribution numbers, combined with high customer satisfaction rates, reflect PBM's dedication to efficient service delivery. Collectively, these efforts showcase their unwavering commitment to improving health outcomes for Veterans through innovation, resource optimization, and exceptional care coordination.



Office of Pharmacy Benefits Management Accomplishments, Cont.

Key Achievements:

Cost Avoidance and Resource Allocation:

- Achieved more than \$10 billion in cost avoidance through competitively bid national contracts and temporary price reductions, reallocating saved pharmacy budget dollars to enhance patient care.

Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP) Efficiency:[GGT((2]

- Shipped 97,397,048 packages to 5.1 million unique Veterans in FY23, maintaining an exceptional level of customer satisfaction as per JD Power survey results.

Antiviral Distribution for COVID-19:

- Centrally coordinated the shipment of 42,695 courses of COVID antivirals across the VA system, ensuring mission-critical treatment availability for Veterans.

Clinical Pharmacist Practitioners (CPPs) Expansion:

- Employed 6,013 CPPs who provide comprehensive medication management services to nearly 1.6 million Veterans, connecting them to timely and optimal care.

Pharmacogenomics (PGx) Campaign and EXCLAIM Initiative:

- Partnered with the National Pharmacogenomics Program to launch the national PGx Academic Detailing campaign and the EXCLAIM initiative, which introduced more than 100 CPPs to integrate PGx testing into clinical practice.

Pharmacy Technician Qualification Standards Revision:

- Updated the Pharmacy Technician Qualification Standards to reflect professional advancements and address staffing shortages within VA.



National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Accomplishments



National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP): Advancing Veteran Health Awareness and Preventative Care

Introduction:

The National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention is instrumental in advancing health awareness and preventative care among Veterans. By forging strategic partnerships and launching targeted health campaigns, the center is connecting Veterans to essential care and supporting their long-term health. The center displayed its commitment to Veteran health through its active participation in National Lung Cancer Screening Day, aligning the event with Veterans Day to highlight the importance of preventative screenings in Veterans. The creative partnership with NASA not only increased the visibility of lung cancer awareness but also demonstrated an innovative approach to health education. The center's comprehensive vaccine campaigns reflect its proactive stance in protecting Veterans against a variety of respiratory illnesses, particularly in the face of evolving viral threats.

Moreover, the MOVE! weight management program's collaboration with other VA offices to address the complex issue of eating disorders showcases a holistic approach to health management, considering both the physical and mental well-being of Veterans. The development and dissemination of clinician education materials signify the center's dedication to equipping healthcare providers with the knowledge to offer more comprehensive care.

These efforts collectively contribute to VA's overarching healthcare priority of connecting Veterans to the soonest and best care possible, with a focus on prevention and early intervention to improve long-term health outcomes.



MOVE! Physical Activity Program Coordinator Sophia Hurley represented NCP at the 2024 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic



National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Accomplishments, Cont.



Key Achievements:

National Lung Cancer Screening Day

Collaboration:

- Partnered with the American Cancer Society and the National Lung Cancer Roundtable to observe National Lung Cancer Screening Day on Veterans Day, November 11, 2023.
- Engaged 113 VA medical facilities in a week-long campaign to raise awareness of the importance of lung cancer screening among Veterans.

Awareness and Media Engagement:

- Collaborated with NASA to produce and distribute a Lung Cancer Awareness video within VA and NASA Goddard facilities.
- Conducted a satellite media tour for the event, achieving nearly 860,000 engagements across various media platforms.

Vaccine Campaign Launches:

- Launched comprehensive vaccine campaigns for COVID-19, seasonal influenza, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV).
- As of December 27, 2023, successfully administered seasonal influenza vaccines to over 1.9 million Veterans, the updated COVID-19 vaccine formula to 710,000, and RSV vaccines to 70,000.

MOVE! Weight Management Program

Enhancements:

- In conjunction with the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention and Nutrition and Food Services, bolstered support for MOVE! clinicians in addressing eating disorder symptoms among Veterans seeking weight management assistance.
- Created new educational materials on eating disorders for clinicians and disseminated information through a live webinar with nearly 800 VA staff attendees.



With the support of the MOVE! team at the Lt. Col. Luke Weathers, Jr. VA Medical Center in Memphis, Tenn., Veteran Vickie Dowery gradually transformed her health and her life.



Working with the MOVE! team at the VA Medical Center in Battle Creek, MI, Dan developed new, healthy habits to enable him to take control of his health. His new lifestyle has helped him embrace the things he loves in life, such as spending time outdoors.

Office of Sterile Processing Accomplishments

Office of Sterile Processing: Elevating Standards for Safe and Efficient Veteran Care

Introduction:

The Office of Sterile Processing (OSP) is instrumental in ensuring the highest standards of sterilization processes within VA, providing essential support for safe patient care. Through a series of strategic initiatives and educational programs, the OSP fortified its operations to support the efficient delivery of reusable medical devices (RMDs) and improve surgical outcomes for Veterans. By successfully conducting a comprehensive national exercise, the OSP reinforced its commitment to continuous improvement and resource optimization.

The office adeptly managed significant financial resources, directing them toward critical upgrades that bolster system performance. Through concerted efforts in standardizing practices and modernizing equipment, along with ensuring thorough training and education for staff, OSP solidified the foundation for delivering safe and reliable care. The impressive certification pass rates and the deployment of targeted orientation programs for new nurse executives demonstrate OSP's proactive approach to leadership development and quality assurance. Collaborative efforts with key offices and the expansion of educational opportunities have been crucial in maintaining high standards of care for Veterans, particularly in the critical area of sterile processing.

Key Achievements:

National Point-in-Time Exercise:

- Executed a national exercise to verify the robustness of Sterile Processing Service (SPS) processes, leading to the identification of best practices and improvement opportunities for operational efficiency.

Site Visit Oversight:

- Oversaw findings from priority site visits, actively tracking and providing collaborative oversight to ensure the resolution of critical issues.

Standardization and Modernization:

- Coordinated national contracts to standardize and modernize business and clinical practices across VHA SPS, improving quality and safety in patient care.



Sterile Processing EHRM Council Establishment:

- Formed a council dedicated to ensuring standardization across disciplines, workforce, equipment, and SPS design, including instrument tracking system enhancements.

Office of Sterile Processing Accomplishments, Cont.

Key Achievements Cont.:

Quality and Safety Measures:

- Continued to promote best practices and maintain a surgery RMD cancellation rate of less than 1%, emphasizing efficiency and safe medical device provision.

Site Visit Reporting Enhancements:

- Refined site visit reports to include executive summaries and priority findings, integrated Health Reliability Organization (HRO) principles and involved VISN in the review process.

Education and Training Expansion:

- Expanded SPS education to include training from various VHA program offices and partnered with the Office of Accreditation for Joint Commission training sessions, engaging more than 1,000 VHA staff members.

Certification and Communication Improvements:

- Overhauled the OSP education communication SharePoint site and certification request process, achieving a 92% certification pass rate following educational sessions.

Orientation Planning for New Leaders:

- Established an orientation planning work group, resulting in comprehensive training modules and an orientation plan for new Associate Directors for Patient Care Services (ADPCS).

Training for Nurse Executives:

- Successfully deployed new orientation training for SPS Nurse Executives, including VISN Chief Nursing Officers and facility ADPCS, with significant attendance.

Leadership Resource Guide Development:

- Created a training and resource guide for SPS leaders, ensuring 100% training completion among VISN Chief Sterile Processing Officers and establishing a dedicated SharePoint site for resource access.

Clinical Restructuring Reviews:

- Collaborated on Clinical Restructuring Reviews with the National Surgery Office and other key stakeholders, supporting new program implementations while securing necessary sterile processing resources.

Public Health National Program Office Accomplishments

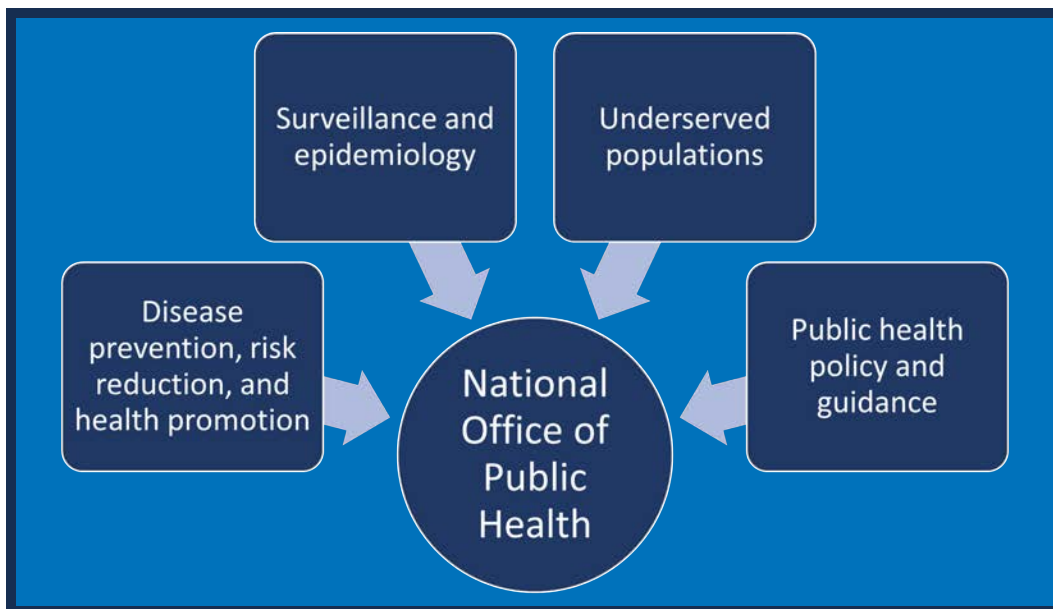
Public Health National Program Office (OPH): Spearheading Epidemiology, Surveillance, and Preparedness in VA Healthcare

Introduction:

The Public Health National Program Office is a cornerstone in the nationwide effort to safeguard the health of Veterans through comprehensive public health initiatives. Focused on epidemiologic research, disease surveillance, and emergency preparedness, OPH ensures that the VA remains at the forefront of public health defenses, policy-making, and emergency response. OPH demonstrated exemplary performance in conducting critical public health functions, from deep-dive investigations into the epidemiology of infectious diseases to maintaining vigilant surveillance for conditions like Monkey Pox, influenza, and RSV.

The office's work in reporting vaccination coverage is essential in national efforts to control the spread of infectious diseases. In response to the growing challenge of climate change, OPH has taken proactive steps to examine the impact of infectious diseases and develop tracking tools to monitor the health effects on Veterans. This forward-thinking approach indicates the office's dedication to adapting and responding to environmental changes that pose new public health challenges.

In the domain of emergency preparedness, OPH has been steadfast in its oversight of critical response assets and its role in national biodefense strategy discussions, ensuring that VA is well-equipped to respond to public health emergencies. The office's contribution to the broader scientific community through published research and presentations at conferences has not only advanced public health knowledge, but has cemented the VA's role as a leader in public health initiatives. Through these comprehensive efforts, OPH continues to fortify the VA's capacity to provide the highest level of care to Veterans while preparing for and responding to the dynamic challenges of public health emergencies.



Office of Public Health Accomplishments, Cont.



Key Achievements

Epidemiologic Investigations and Publications:

- Conducted a significant Mpox case surveillance investigation, with findings published in the "Journal of Infectious Diseases" in December 2023.
- Completed research on the epidemiology of Coccidioidomycosis, published in the "Journal of Fungi" in July 2023, and presented findings on Lyme disease at the IDWeek Conference in October 2023.

Vaccination Coverage and Reporting:

- Partnered with the CDC to report on national Mpox vaccination coverage, with more than 8,800 VHA-administered Mpox vaccines reported by year-end.

Surveillance Reporting:

- Monitored influenza and RSV trends, producing biweekly surveillance reports and real-time vaccination dashboards.

Climate Change and Infectious Diseases:

- Explored the intersection of emerging infectious diseases and climate change, contributing to developing a Veteran-specific Heat and Health Tracker in collaboration with the CDC.

VA Climate Action and Adaptation:

- Actively participated in the VA Climate Adaptation Working Group, advancing the goals of the 2021 VA Climate Action/Adaptation Plan.

Public Health Operations Quality Assessment:

- Investigated and published findings on sexually transmitted infection testing in the "Sexually Transmitted Diseases" journal and conducted a lookback activity in response to potential exposure to bloodborne pathogens at a VA Medical Center.

Emergency Preparedness Initiatives:

- Oversaw VA's All-Hazards Emergency Cache sites and led the AHEC Leadership Committee.
- Engaged in strategic policy activities with the Public Health Emergency Countermeasures Enterprise (PHEMCE) and contributed to the Cleland-Dole Act and the USG National Biodefense Strategy Plan as subject matter experts.

Public Health Reference Laboratory Support:

- Supported VHA Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Service with specialized clinical laboratory testing and pathogen sequencing and established national testing programs for infectious diseases.
-

Caregiver Support Program Accomplishments

Caregiver Support Program: Empowering and Supporting VA Caregivers Nationwide

Introduction:

Caregiver Support Program (CSP) made significant advancements in providing comprehensive assistance and resources to caregivers of Veterans. Through the expansion of programs, innovative partnerships, and enhanced communication efforts, CSP is dedicated to acknowledging the critical role caregivers play in the health and well-being of Veterans.

CSP showed a steadfast commitment to enhancing the lives of caregivers through a broad spectrum of initiatives. The successful expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) is a testament to the program's inclusivity and responsiveness to the needs of caregivers. The implementation of efficient application processes and the provision of critical resources like legal, financial, and mental health support further demonstrate CSP's dedication to the caregiver community. Notably, the program's collaborative efforts with various VA offices resulted in significant outreach, such as the provision of CPR training and the expansion of virtual psychotherapy services, ensuring caregivers are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to support the Veterans in their care. Furthermore, CSP's focus on improving communication and transparency in the appeals and reviews process, along with developing tools for better decision-letter clarity, demonstrates a commitment to service excellence.

Engaging with caregivers and Veterans through listening sessions and site visits allows CSP to tailor services effectively to regional and individual needs. In addition to these services, CSP's initiative to provide training in multiple languages ensures that all caregivers have access to the resources they need, regardless of language barriers. These comprehensive efforts collectively contribute to CSP's mission to support and empower caregivers who play a vital role in the health and well-being of our nation's Veterans.



Caregiver Support Program Accomplishments, Cont.



Key Achievements:

Program Expansion:

- Launched the second phase of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) expansion to include Veterans of all service eras.

Caregiver Resources and Support:

- Provided various resources to caregivers, including respite care, mentoring, psychotherapy, and financial and legal services, supporting 74,270 active participants in PCAFC and PGCSS by the end of FY23.

Application Processing Efficiency:

- Improved the disposition of PCAFC applications, achieving a 98% processing rate within 90 days.

Virtual Psychotherapy Program:

- Partnered with the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention to deliver tele-mental health services to caregivers, with plans to expand these services across all VISNs.

Legal and Financial Planning Services:

- Introduced expert-led legal and financial planning services to Primary Family Caregivers enrolled in PCAFC, complemented by a suite of web-based educational tools.

CPR Training for Caregivers:

- Collaborated with the Center for Development and Civic Engagement to offer CPR training to caregivers, with successful completion at multiple sites.

Appeals and Reviews:

- Increased Review and Appeals staffing by 60% to expedite the processing of appeals and improved communication regarding claims processes.

Communication Enhancements:

- Developed the Letter Builder Tool to provide clearer PCAFC decision letters and created new dashboards to guide and improve caregiver support.

Listening Sessions and Site Visits:

- Conducted virtual and in-person site visits to gather feedback from caregivers and Veterans, enhancing the understanding of regional needs and CSP services.

Health and Well-Being Support:

- Trained Caregiver Health and Well-Being Coaches to provide personalized health plans for caregivers.

Multilingual Resources:

- Expanded the translation of the training curriculum to multiple languages, ensuring accessibility for diverse caregiver communities.
-

Office of Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services Accomplishments

Office of Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services (RPS): Enhancing Veteran Independence and Community Integration

Introduction:

The Office of Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services provides exceptional rehabilitation services and prosthetic devices with a mission to restore, enhance, and preserve the health and independence of American Veterans. RPS envisions maximizing Veterans' functional independence and their successful reintegration into communities through a continuum of services and advanced technologies in partnership with Veterans and their families. RPS is steadfast in its commitment to advancing the rehabilitation and prosthetics services available to Veterans. Through strategic initiatives, such as the expansion of chiropractic care and the integration of physical therapy into primary care, RPS substantially improved the scope and quality of care for Veterans.

The significant reduction in opioid prescriptions among Veterans treated for low back pain highlights the effectiveness of non-pharmacological pain management options offered by RPS. Furthermore, RPS's efforts in reducing actionable legacy appeals demonstrate its dedication to streamlining processes and enhancing the efficiency of the Veterans' appeals system. By providing intensive, specialized care for complex war wounds, RPS addresses the multifaceted needs of this vulnerable Veteran population, focusing on improving both cognitive and physical recovery.

The support for adaptive sports and special events reflects RPS's recognition of the therapeutic benefits of physical activity and social engagement for Veterans with disabilities. The substantial funding and support for athletes training for the Paralympics and Olympics underscore the office's investment in the success and empowerment of Veteran athletes. Collectively, these accomplishments illustrate RPS's pivotal role in enabling Veterans to regain independence and engage more fully in their communities, ensuring that they receive the highest quality of care and support possible.



Office of Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services

Accomplishments, Cont.

Key Achievements:

Expansion of Chiropractic Care:

- Led the deployment of on-station chiropractic services, expanding healthcare choices and access for Veterans.
- Enabled ten of the 18 VISNs to offer chiropractic care at over 75% of their VAMCs.
- Demonstrated that Veterans receiving chiropractic care for low back pain are 25% less likely to be prescribed opioids.



Physical Therapy in PACT:

- Collaborated with the Office of Primary Care and Diffusion of Excellence to embed Physical Therapy (PT) within Patient-Aligned Care Teams (PACT), which were implemented in 86 VA Healthcare Systems.
- Achieved a 31% reduction in PT wait times, with a 97% Veteran satisfaction rate

Reduction of Actionable Legacy Appeals:

- Developed and published national standard operating procedures in alignment with the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017.
- Conducted education and training across all VISNs, leading to a 35% reduction in actionable legacy appeals.

Specialized Care for Complex War Wounded:

- Provided specialized integrated care through the Polytrauma System of Care's Intensive Evaluation and Treatment Program (IETP), with 319 admissions in FY 2023.
- Early program data indicated that 89% of participants reported improved cognitive abilities, and 92% reported physical skills improvements.

Support for Adaptive Sports and Special Events:

- Organized six national adaptive sports and special events, with more than 3,800 Veterans participating in FY23, without any new cases of COVID-19.
 - Distributed approximately \$16 million to 91 adaptive sports and equine-assisted therapy programs nationwide.
 - Supported 176 disabled Veteran athletes in training for Paralympic and Olympic sports through the Veteran Monthly Assistance Allowance program.
-

Physician Assistant Services Accomplishments

Office of Physician Assistant Services (PAS): Enhancements in Mental Health and Education

Introduction:

The Physician Assistant Services program made significant strides in integrating PAs into mental health services and advancing PA education within the VA system. Through collaborative efforts and strategic initiatives, PAS enhanced its role in mental health care and strengthened the educational pathways for PAs.

The program's commitment to developing robust standards of practice and strategic planning demonstrates its dedication to improving the quality and scope of care provided to Veterans. By establishing key educational programs and seeking legislative support for ongoing professional education, the PA program ensures that PAs are well-equipped to meet the evolving needs of the Veteran population. These advancements underscore the PA program's pivotal role in enriching the VA healthcare system and supporting the Veteran community.

Key Achievements:

Mental Health Integration:

- Collaborated with the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention to increase the presence of PAs in mental health care.

National Standards of Practice:

- Finalized phase II of the PA National Standards of Practice, ratified by the AUSH PCS/CNO, along with a comprehensive Information and Communications plan.

Strategic Planning:

- Formulated a strategic plan for 2023-2028, aligning with VA's overarching strategic principles and goals.

Educational Assistance Initiative:

- Successfully launched the Educational Assistance for Certain Former Members of the Armed Forces Program (EACFMAF), providing scholarships to Veterans pursuing PA careers, contingent upon a three-year service obligation in the VA.



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