

# Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2019



**VA SIERRA PACIFIC NETWORK (VISN 21)**



# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Since joining VISN 21, I've had the pleasure of meeting many of you and seeing the great work you're doing for our Veterans. Our network serves the largest geographical area of any within VHA, including some facilities outside of the United States. Our role in Veterans' healthcare is a large one, and it's important that we maintain high standards of care.

In FY19, we've made significant strides to ensure we're providing the best care possible to our Veterans. We have more than 17,000 employees across the Network, and each of you is a crucial part of our mission. Together, we've served more than 400,000 Veterans and conducted 4.8 million outpatient visits. We're continuing to grow, building new facilities and expanding some of the existing ones.

You have shown that ICARE is more than simply an acronym. These values – Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence – are on display every day at all our facilities. Additionally, the level of innovation and expertise that you've all shown is remarkable.

Here at the VISN office, we've worked hard to hire the right people to support the mission and guide us into FY20 and beyond. Some have come from within the VISN, while others came to us from other places in VHA, and even the private sector. Your medical center directors are also working to ensure our staffing needs are met, and we are doing everything we can to give our Veterans the care they've earned.

Moving forward, we will continue to accomplish VA's mission of fulfilling President Lincoln's promise: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.

Thank you for all you've done this year, and for all you'll continue to do in the future.

John A. Brandecker

Network Director, VISN 21

VA SIERRA PACIFIC NETWORK

**VISN 21**

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Veterans from the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Dick Bilyeu Chapter 93, based in Antelope, CA, participate in the City of Rancho Cordova's annual Memorial Day ceremony at the Sacramento VA Medical Center. Photo by Will Martin, Public Affairs Officer, VA Northern California.



## Fresno VA takes part in national baby shower

Will McCullough, Public Affairs Officer, VA Central California

In partnership with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, the Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a "Nationwide Baby Shower." VA Central California Health Care System (VACCHCS) joined 60 VA medical centers around the country that hosted baby showers, the week prior to or following Mother's Day.

The goal of the Nationwide Baby Showers, according to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, is to celebrate Veteran parents, to ease the stress of those first weeks of growing a family, and to assist in making sure they have what they need. The VA also offers comprehensive primary care, prenatal and preconception care, infertility services, and maternity care services, to include the first seven days of newborn care, for Veterans.

VACCHCS team members were present from several departments, including Whole Health, Nutrition and Food, Women's Health and Mental Health services. Each area provided detailed information regarding services provided at VACCHCS. Nursing Education service also presented demonstrations on cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, for infants. Local efforts among community partners and sponsors were coordinated by Women's Health and VA Voluntary Services. Nearly a dozen women Veterans and a couple of soon-to-be

fathers attended the baby shower, which was held on May 17, 2019, in the Dogwood extension of the newly expanded Community Living Center, at VACCHCS.

Representatives from Women Infants and Children, or WIC, a program sponsored by the Fresno Economic Opportunity Commission, presented initiatives and explained how women Veterans might access their services to receive milk and other items during and after their pregnancy. CalVet representatives were also on-hand to offer information describing state and federal benefits offered for Veterans.

VACCHCS team members were present from several departments, including Whole Health, Nutrition and Food, Women's Health and Mental Health services. Each area provided detailed information regarding services provided at VACCHCS. Nursing Education service also presented demonstrations on cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, for infants.



Baby shower attendees received gifts as part of a collaboration with Women's Health and VA Voluntary Services on May 17 at VACCHCS.

Veterans Canteen Service provided lunch for the event, and each of the families were gifted a new car seat, courtesy of Elks Fresno 300, Elks Clovis, and Our Hero's Dream.

Police Service was also in attendance, and provided live instructions on safe car seat installation. Attendees left with a new Diaper bag, donated by DAV of Fresno. Several donors from the community and other sponsors contributed additional baby-related items for participants.

Nationwide, more than 2,400 soon-to-be Veteran parents were recognized.



Army Veteran Pasqual Reyes was presented with a Quilt of Valor on Feb. 13, 2019. Reyes was taken as a prisoner of war by the German Army during World War II, and was later awarded a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. Reyes passed away on Dec. 18, 2019 and was buried with full military honors on Jan. 10, 2020 at Calvary Cemetery in Madera, CA.

Photo by Will McCullough



VACCHCS' Hospital Emergency Response Team (HERT) conducted a large-scale training with community partners and first responders, including mass casualty triage, biological chemical response, simulated casualties and use of a decontamination trailer. HERT's goal is to prepare for emergency situations and ensure staff are properly trained to respond when they occur.

Photo by Kristopher Morrow

## VA CENTRAL CALIFORNIA HCS FY2019 Highlights

Staffing:  
1,485 FTE\*

\*Full-time equivalent employees

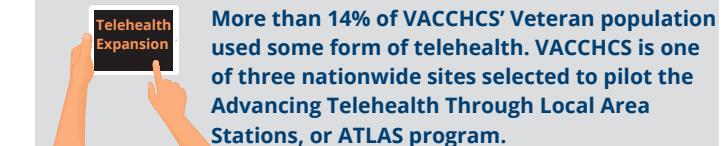
31,962 Unique Patients

432,894 Outpatient Visits



As a result of instituting several measures to improve the overall Veteran Experience, VACCHCS has increased its star rating significantly, from a one-star to a three-star facility.

The operational complexity rating of VACCHCS has increased from a Level 2 (Medium) to a Level 1C (High) Facility.



More than 14% of VACCHCS' Veteran population used some form of telehealth. VACCHCS is one of three nationwide sites selected to pilot the Advancing Telehealth Through Local Area Stations, or ATLAS program.

### Whole Health Design site

VACCHCS offers patient orientation classes and continued support from trained peer support specialists and four new Whole Health Coaches to build Veteran/family partnerships.

### ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGE\*\*

FY17: 67.43%  
FY18: 69.00%  
FY19: 70.33%

\*\*Enrollment percentage is the percentage of total Veterans within a facility's catchment area who have enrolled in VA care



## VA NorCal launches new health care options under MISSION Act

**Will Martin, Public Affairs Officer, VA Northern California**

If you've been paying attention to news in the Veteran community lately, you've probably noticed a lot of talk about something called the MISSION Act.

Locally, the MISSION Act will empower the more than 100,000 Northern California Veterans that VA NorCal serves each year to have more options in their health care decisions.

"We're committed to providing not only compassionate, high-quality health care to Northern California Veterans, but also providing that care at the right time and place," said VA NorCal Health Care System Director David Stockwell.

The VA MISSION Act (officially titled the "VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018"):

- Strengthens VA's ability to recruit and retain clinicians
- Statutorily authorizes "Anywhere to Anywhere" telehealth provision across state lines
- Empowers Veterans with increased access to community care
- Establishes a new, urgent-care benefit that eligible Veterans can access in the community
- Veterans can now work with their VA NorCal health care provider or other staff to see if they

are eligible to receive care in the health care community outside VA NorCal (it's important to note that eligibility for community care does not require a Veteran to receive that care in the community; Veterans can still choose to have VA NorCal provide their care).

Veterans are eligible to choose to receive care in the community if they meet any of the following six eligibility criteria:

1. A Veteran needs a service not available at any VA medical facility.
  2. A Veteran lives in a U.S. state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility. Specifically, this would apply to Veterans living in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire and the U.S. territories of Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
  3. A Veteran qualifies under the "grandfather" provision related to distance eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program.
  4. VA cannot furnish care in a manner that complies within certain designated access standards. The specific access standards are described below.
  5. Average drive time to a specific VA medical facility:
- a. 30-minute average drive time for primary care, mental health and noninstitutional extended care services.
  - b. 60-minute average drive time for specialty care.
  - Appointment wait time at a specific VA medical facility:
  - a. 20 days for primary care, mental health care and noninstitutional extended care services, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.
  - b. 28 days for specialty care from the date of request, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.
  - 5. The Veteran and the referring clinician agree it is in the best medical interest of the Veteran to receive community care based on defined factors.
  - 6. VA has determined that a VA medical service line is not providing care in a manner that complies with VA's standards for quality.
- For more information on the MISSION Act and its impact on VA health care across Northern California, visit [www.missionact.va.gov](http://www.missionact.va.gov).



The Chico VA outpatient clinic opened its doors in August 2019, improving access to care for Veterans living in the area.

## A 'significant step forward'

*New outpatient clinic opens for Veterans in Chico*  
Will Martin, Public Affairs Officer, VA Northern California

Butte County was due for some good news. Less than a year removed from the devastating Camp Fire, local Veterans and residents have longed for some inspiration.

That encouragement finally arrived on Aug. 21, when about 200 VA employees, Veterans, and supporters gathered for a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Chico VA Outpatient Clinic on Concord Road.

"Today is the day we finally get to celebrate having our own dedicated clinic in Chico," said VA NorCal Director David Stockwell. "We're not using somebody else's space, we're not (trying) to make it work. We've literally designed this clinic specifically for Veteran care."

At 42,000 square feet, the new facility is about twice the size of the previous clinic, and, as a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) silver-rated building, it includes energy-reducing and cost-saving features.

Staffed by more than 150 personnel, the clinic employs about 50 more VA personnel than the previous clinic. More space and more staff translate to better Veteran care.

"We have upgrades on all of our equipment, we have the latest and greatest that is out there in the

health care space," said Ryan Schiel, the Chico VA Outpatient Clinic site manager.

"We're also adding new services for patients, so they no longer have to go to Redding for physical therapy, occupational therapy, chiropractic services... and also an eye clinic. A lot of our patients get new glasses up in Redding; they can do that now in Chico."

While it took about two years to complete the building, project managers were able to do so for far less than planners anticipated, a fact not lost on local elected officials.

"This project has been under way for some time, and at a projected cost of \$43 million and it came in under cost at \$30 million," said Randall Stone, Chico's mayor. "That's exactly the kind of thing we want to do in the city of Chico."

The clinic will serve about 9,000 Veterans from across the region surrounding Chico, and its expanded telehealth services will empower more Veterans to attend appointments via computer, tablet, or smart phone from the convenience of home.

For a look inside the new clinic, watch [this two-minute video](#).

## VA NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HCS FY2019 Highlights

Staffing:  
4,257 FTE

97,592  
Unique  
Patients

1.23M  
Outpatient  
Visits



### NEW REDDING CLINIC

On May 29, 2019, VANCHCS conducted a groundbreaking ceremony for a new 77,000-square-foot outpatient clinic in Redding. The new clinic will include more than 500 parking spaces and nearly 30,000 more square feet of usable space than the current location. Completion is expected in 2021.



### VA NORTHERN CALIFORNIA IS THE TENTH LARGEST VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

\*based on total appointments provided



### EXPANDED VIDEO-TO-HOME DOCTOR APPOINTMENTS TO MORE THAN 3,000 ANNUAL VISITS IN FY19.



### HOSPITAL IN HOME

In September 2019, the Hospital In Home program was launched. Up to nine patients can be treated with hospital-level care in their home.



### ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGE

FY17: 61.83%  
FY18: 63.89%  
FY19: 65.74%



## Veteran credits VA care for shaping his life

On May 22, 2007, Thomas Kahalu Lee Jr.'s IAV Stryker came under small arms fire in Afghanistan and was struck by an IED. As a result, he suffered significant shrapnel damage and his right leg was amputated above the knee.

A Veteran of both the Army and the Navy, Lee's service began in 1995 when he enlisted in the Navy. He served for four years and was honorably discharged in 1999. He was attending college when the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked on Sept. 11, 2001. This inspired him to re-enlist, this time in the Army.

After the IED attack, his injuries forced him to be medically retired in 2008.

Through dogged determination, resourcefulness, help from the military health care system, VA and defense and VA contractors, he has been able to have access to several generations of the latest prosthetics that have allowed him to regain much of his physical capability and love of long-distance running.

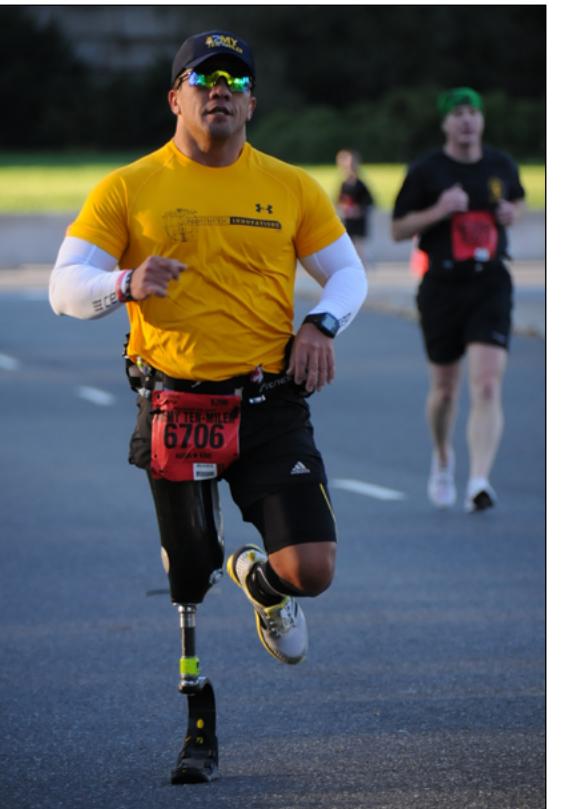
A resident of Oahu for the past three

years, Lee is now using his experience to spread awareness of the difficulties facing Veterans with amputation. He spoke to Veteran amputees and VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) employees in a presentation entitled "How Research and Prosthetics Helped Shape my Life!"

His message focused on great technological advancement in prosthetics through research, while also acknowledging that the availability and access process to attain the equipment is not well-defined and not universal throughout the country.

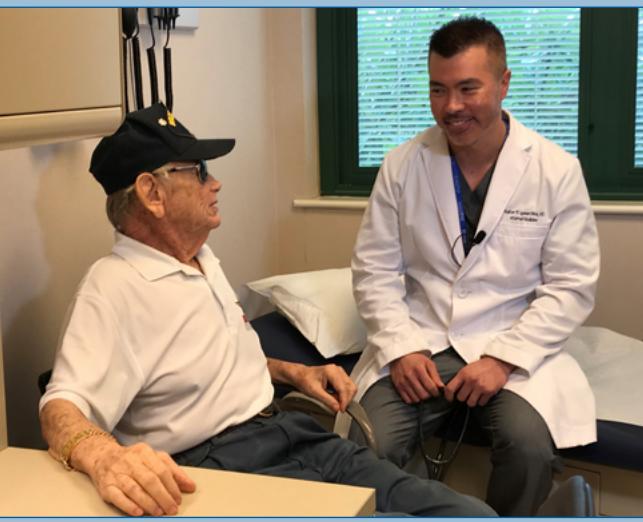
Finding the right prosthetic specialist for a specific injury can be done, but it takes perseverance, networking and often the need to travel. Many sites, like Hawaii, are still working to improve care.

His talk elicited a new awareness of the difficulties facing Veterans with amputations from the mixed audience of Veterans and VAPIHCS healthcare providers. Lee has offered to be a resource to the amputee community in this area where development has outpaced the delivery system, and one in which VA is constantly improving.



Army and Navy Veteran Thomas Kahalu Lee, Jr. spoke at VAPIHCS to discuss VA care for amputees.

## 2019 Healthcare Hero



Dr. Walter Igawa-Silva, right, was selected by the Healthcare Association of Hawaii as a 2019 Hawaii Healthcare Hero. He is seen here with Lt. Col. (ret.) Leonard Kacher, who nominated him for the honor. [See video here.](#)

## Sec. Wilkie visits VA Pacific Islands



Above: VA Secretary Robert Wilkie presents a challenge coin to Korean War Veteran and 9-year VAPIHCS volunteer Herb Schreiner. Wilkie visited the Honolulu facility in December 2018. He later visited Veterans at VA's Guam facility.



Right: Sec. Wilkie, left, speaks with a Veteran as former VAPIHCS Director Jennifer Gutowski looks on.

## VA PACIFIC ISLANDS HCS

FY2019 Highlights

Staffing:  
1,191 FTE

36,692  
Unique  
Patients

336,399  
Outpatient  
Visits

**168%**

More than 13% of Veterans are receiving some form of Telehealth, a 168% increase over FY2018.

VAPIHCS has the only VA All-Virtual Rural Pain Team in the country, using technology to better serve Veterans in rural areas.

54% of staff have attended VA Voices, enabling them to better connect with each other and improve customer service.

### ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGE



FY17: 62.44%  
FY18: 64.82%  
FY19: 66.75%





## VA Sec. Wilkie visits Palo Alto

Kim Betton, Chief of Public Affairs, VA Palo Alto Health Care System



World War II Veteran Tom Dimperio poses with family and Secretary Wilkie after receiving a commemorative coin for his dedicated service.

Robert L. Wilkie, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, visited VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCs) on Oct. 11, 2018, to discuss national VA initiatives with administrators and meet with Veterans and employees.

Escorted by VAPAHCs Director and U.S. Army Veteran Thomas J. Fitzgerald III and members of the executive leadership team, Wilkie toured the medical center's Palo Alto and Menlo Park campuses.

"We are grateful Sec. Wilkie saw first-hand the quality care and excellent patient experience we offer

our Veterans on a daily basis," said Director Fitzgerald. "To have him visit with us is a win-win for Veterans, our staff, and our community."

During the visit, Secretary Wilkie presented 100-year-old World War II Veteran Tom Dimperio with a challenge coin for his dedicated service.

In addition, several VA employees received the Secretary's challenge coin for their outstanding work supporting our Veterans.

The visit was part of Sec. Wilkie's commitment to quality service.

## VA Palo Alto nursing homes rate five stars VA Uses Medicare Methodology to Rate Facilities Around the Country

VA's recent Community Living Center (CLC) Compare Report shows VA Palo Alto Health Care System rates higher than, or comparable to, national averages in quality measures.

Overall ratings for CLCs at its Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Livermore Divisions were rated five stars.

"The five-star rating of our CLCs at all three divisions shows the dedication and quality of the staff and volunteers in these facilities," said VAPAHCs Director Thomas J. Fitzgerald III. "As a proud Veteran, I am thankful to know that Veterans receiving

care in these facilities are getting the level of care they deserve."

The report is adapted from Medicare's five-star rating methodology, using 11 of the 16 quality measures, to give a rating between one and five stars.

CLC ratings are based on health surveys, staffing and quality of resident care measures.

VA surveyors look at the care, interactions, and environment when visiting facilities around the country. They also review clinical records, interview residents and family members, caregivers, and administrative staff.



VAPAHCs' Menlo Park CLC was rated five-stars in a recent VA CLC Compare Report.



VAPAHCs Director Tony Fitzgerald shakes hands with a Vietnam Veteran.

## VA Palo Alto honors Vietnam Vets

Michael Hill-Jackson, Public Affairs Specialist

On March 29, in recognition of National Vietnam War Veterans Day, VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCs) Director Thomas J. Fitzgerald III and his executive team honored Vietnam Veterans with visits to inpatient Vietnam Veterans.

Leadership handed out ceremonial coins to Veterans, and Veterans Canteen Service kicked off the two-day recognition of events with a cake ceremony in the Patriot Café.

As authorized by Congress and on behalf of the nation, the Department of Veterans Affairs partners with the

Department of Defense (DoD) to do what officials say should have been done 50 years ago: thank and honor our Vietnam Veterans and their families just as America did for the Veterans of World War II and Korea.

Each year on this day, more than 10,000 Commemorative Partners around the country are enlisted to thank and honor the 7.2 million living Vietnam Veterans and families of all 9 million who served.

At VA Palo Alto, We honor our Vietnam Veterans - on this day and beyond.



Significant improvements lowered phone wait times and abandonment rates for our Veterans. Callers now experience an average hold time of only 63 seconds, compared to the 341 seconds the previous year. The abandonment rate of callers has drastically been reduced from 23.6 percent to 3.1 percent. Major changes included hiring additional medical support assistants to answer telephone calls as well as upgrading their phone systems.

## VA PALO ALTO HCS

FY2019 Highlights

**Staffing:**  
3,870 FTE

**65,445**  
**Unique**  
**Patients**

**790,232**  
**Outpatient**  
**Visits**



Building 105, a 17,000-square-foot simulation center, was activated in October of 2018. The new facility houses simulation centers to help educate and train staff members.



The new San Jose community-based outpatient clinic was opened. This 90,000-square-foot Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) clinic provides primary care, mental health, physical therapy, radiology, optometry and more.



VA Palo Alto's second Fisher House building was opened. This facility offers free, high-quality, temporary lodging to families of Veterans and active duty military personnel who are undergoing treatment.



The Field House, soccer fields, softball fields, basketball courts, Bocce courts, and adjacent parking areas were opened in April 2019.

## ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGE

**FY17: 62.44%**

**FY18: 64.82%**

**FY19: 66.75%**





# Telehealth helps bring care closer to Veterans

When Air Force Veteran Mostafa Mostafa had a sore throat in August 2019, the San Francisco resident was ready to make the drive across town to the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC). Even with no traffic, this trek could take anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes each way. He called the San Francisco VA Health Care System's (SFVAHCS) Telephone Linked Care (TLC) line to make an appointment with his primary care doctor. The TLC nurse offered Mostafa a VA Video Connect (VAVC) appointment for the same day that he could make without leaving the comfort of his home. He was skeptical to say the least.

"I was curious if they would be able to diagnose me through just a camera on my phone," he said. "I figured it was worth a shot. I had nothing to lose."

In five minutes, Dr. Janeen Smith was able to examine Mostafa's throat using the camera on his smartphone, order a strep swab test and prescribe throat lozenges. The virtual visit saved Mostafa a trip to the SFVAMC emergency room, where he potentially could have exposed other Veterans or VA employees to possible infection if he were contagious. Mostafa was surprisingly impressed with his care.

"The appointment was quick, and I didn't even have to leave my residence or drive anywhere," he said. "If I had driven to the medical center to see my primary care doctor, I would have had to find

## FY 2019 SFVAHCS Telehealth Statistics:

Visits with Rural Veterans:

**21,935**

Specialties Offered:

**40**

States in which Veterans received telehealth care:

**32**

parking and then waited in a waiting room for who knows how long to see my doctor. This was so much simpler and more convenient."

VAVC is a new virtual model of telehealth care that lets Veterans securely connect with their health care teams from just about anywhere by using devices that have an internet connection and a web camera. The technology is especially convenient to Veterans who live far from a VA

medical center or clinic or who live in rural areas, where many specialty care services can be hard to find or have long wait times. In addition to VAVC, there are several other ways Veterans can take advantage of VA telehealth services: at home and in VA community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC) and medical centers.

## Telehealth Care in Veterans' Homes

The SFVAHCS Home Telehealth Program allows Veterans to receive their care from the convenience of their homes and mobile devices. Home telehealth services include remote patient monitoring and VAVC. Telehealth remote patient monitoring technologies are located inside Veterans' homes and can collect and send health data in real time, such as vital signs, directly to VA clinicians located miles away.

## Telehealth at CBOCs & SFVAMC

In addition to the Home Telehealth Program, telehealth technologies located at SFVAHCS CBOCs are able to save Veterans unnecessary time and travel by offering appointments and care with doctors located miles away at the SFVAMC.

During a telehealth session at a CBOC, patients meet with a technician who operates the video and medical equipment. VA clinicians in other locations can talk with Veterans through a screen, make diagnoses, manage care and perform check-ups.

Kristine Brown, Air Force Veteran and SFVAHCS chief nurse and clinical director of ambulatory care, was one of 24 women Veterans at the SFVAHCS who participated in VA's "I Am Not Invisible" photography project aimed at increasing awareness of women Veterans.

*Photo by Edgardo Caballero.*



The SFVAHCS celebrated National Vietnam Veterans Day on March 29, 2019, by holding events at the SFVAMC and community-based outpatient clinics.

## SAN FRANCISCO VA HCS FY2019 Highlights

Staffing:  
2,659 FTE

71,225  
Unique  
Patients

669,882  
Outpatient  
Visits

Printing 3D models in-house has improved Veterans' access to care and saved more than \$30,000

SAN FRANCISCO VA PROVIDES TELEHEALTH SUPPORT TO MORE THAN 51 VA SITES IN 32 STATES.

Established a Student Veteran Health Program, partnering with: City College of San Francisco, College of the Redwoods, Skyline College, Napa Valley College and Santa Rosa Junior College

## ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGE

FY17: 59.90%

FY18: 62.64%

FY19: 65.05%





# VA staff helps WWII Veteran celebrate 100th birthday

Glen E. Smith, Public Affairs Officer, VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System

In November, a surprise birthday celebration was hosted by VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic staff in Susanville, CA. Leadership from VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System also attended, along with U.S. Rep. Doug LaMalfa (CA-1), his wife, Jill, Susanville Mayor Kevin Stafford, Susanville Councilmembers & City Officials, and many community members. They all came together to honor a very special World War II Veteran: former U.S. Army Nurse Jean Boucher Fernandez.

Fernandez's story was uncovered by Christina Burr, a writer-editor for VA Sierra Nevada HCS. Her series, *MyLife MyStory*, began as a project to help VA doctors and nurses connect with the Veterans they care for. Better understanding Veterans' personal military histories allow clinicians to improve treatment and individualized healthcare solutions. While each Veteran is treasured, some military stories, like Jean's, are remarkable.

What makes Jean even more endearing is that she really thought nothing of the treacherous combat encounters because she was there to save the lives of our servicemembers in battle. Her resilience, like that of all our Veterans, is inspiring.

Fernandez was one of 20 U.S. Army nurses whose orders were to cross the English Channel



VA Sierra Nevada HCS staff, U.S. Rep. Doug LaMalfa, and other community members helped honor U.S. Army Veteran Jean Fernandez on her 100th birthday at the VA CBOC in Susanville, CA.

to the beaches of Normandy, France, in Sept. 1944, just 3 short months after D-Day. Their original mission involved transport to a hospital in Belgium, where they would prepare for wounded American soldiers from the impending Battle of the Bulge, which eventually commenced in December 1944.

Due to a logistical oversight, the nurses' lockers did not get loaded onto the ship before they left England. Dressed in the only clothes they had,

Fernandez and the other nurses scaled down the large net ladders in their skirts, nylons, and long trench coats onto the small LCVP Higgins landing craft. They were unloaded in four to five feet of ocean water and had to swim to shore. Fernandez and the other nurses camped in a cow pasture for 30 days until their clothes and other supplies arrived. She remembers sleeping in her cot on the muddy pasture and by morning, it had completely sunk into the mud. Her nylons and clothes were



U.S. Army nurse Jean Fernandez, who recently celebrated her 100th birthday, stands in front of a French hospital during World War II.

completely black by the time her locker arrived.

By the time their supplies arrived, it was too dangerous for the 20 nurses to post at the Belgium hospital. The area was still heavily occupied by Germans. They were sent to a hospital in Rouen, France, which also was still occupied by the Germans. Once safe to access the hospital, some severely wounded German soldiers were left behind, too weak to be moved.

Fernandez said it was difficult to see so many wounded American soldiers. She recalls one commander ordered all "shell-shocked" soldiers to be placed on the hospital's fifth floor. This decision proved unsafe because each time bombers flew low overhead, the men ran to the windows to try to jump out.

For the wounded, seeing these resilient young nurses was an inspiration. At a time when women were seldom in combat zones, these women Veterans endured and made their nation proud.

On her 100th birthday, Fernandez could not believe the outpouring of love and appreciation shown to her. She proudly considers herself a "Bulge Veteran."

In a tribute to Fernandez, Rep. LaMalfa spoke on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on Jan. 24, 2020, to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Battle of the Bulge. His floor speech can be [viewed here](#).

In partnership with the Reno VA Medical Center, Rep. LaMalfa's

office also presented Fernandez with a flag flown over a World War II battle cemetery in St. Lo, France, in recognition of both her 100th birthday and the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge.



U.S. Army Veteran Jean Fernandez served overseas during World War II, and spoke about her experiences at her recent 100th birthday celebration. All photos courtesy of Jean Fernandez.



## VA SIERRA NEVADA HCS

FY2019 Highlights

Staffing:  
1,532 FTE

33,304  
Unique  
Patients

460,823  
Outpatient  
Visits

- 98% of appointments within 30 days of patient preferred date

- 96% same-day appointments for new enrollees

- Expanded partnerships with University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine and Nursing School to incorporate Mental Health Nurse Practitioners and Clinical Nurse Leaders

- Implemented a Pathways program to train staff nurses for critical care positions

## ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGE

FY17: 65.51%

FY18: 67.62%

FY19: 69.19%





## VA helps Veterans walk again

John Archiquette, VASNHS Public Affairs Specialist

Mark Christianson served as a Green Beret in the U.S. Army and retired in 1991 with over 20 years of service. After a surgery to remove a tumor from his spinal cord left him with incomplete paralysis, Christianson has dedicated himself to recovery.

One of his biggest goals is to walk again. For several years, he has worked extensively with VA spinal doctors and physical therapists to test the newest technological devices. Christianson's efforts have taken him to VA hospitals across the southwestern United States.

While working with physical therapists in Palo Alto, CA, in March 2019, Christianson finally discovered the device that he believes meets his needs better than any previous device: the Indego powered exoskeleton system.

VA Palo Alto was selected as one of the first training hubs for the Indego system. The only problem for Christianson was that he and his wife live in Las Vegas, NV.

After long trips back and forth from California, sleeping in hotels, and not being able to see his therapists at VASNHS that he had developed a close relationship with, Christianson suggested that the North Las Vegas Medical Center could become an Indego-certified facility so that he and other Veterans could do their training there. Thanks to his efforts, along with the VASNHS physical therapy team, that is happening.

"For me it's a life changer," Christianson said. "All the effort that I put in initially to make sure that the program came over and was implemented here, now I get to see the fruits of my labor lived out through my fellow Veterans who are going to be here and be able to participate in this program. It's going to change lives and it's going to be done

locally rather than off in California.

In years past, Veterans living with paralysis, could only dream of walking again. With powered exoskeletons like the Indego system, the determination of Veterans like Christianson, and the dedication of trained VASNHS staff, this dream is becoming a reality in Southern Nevada.

"It's a team effort," Christianson said. "We have doctors who are spinal cord surgeons. There are the physical therapists that are specifically trained to deal with spinal cord injuries, as well as the assistants. I could not ask for better treatment and a better care team than what I have received here. It's a breath of fresh air."



Shanna Nijem, VASNHS Physical Therapist, fits Vietnam Veteran Mark Christianson with the Indego powered exoskeleton system.

## New director brings vision, experience to VASNHS

John Archiquette, VASNHS Public Affairs Specialist

Leadership at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System changed June 10 as new Director William J. "Bill" Caron joined the staff. As VASNHS' chief executive officer, Caron assumes responsibility for one of the fastest growing VA health care systems in the nation, providing the delivery of care and services to more than 63,000 Veterans across Southern Nevada.

Caron returns to VASNHS, where he previously served as associate director from 2014 to 2017, which included a nine-month stint as acting director in 2015. When asked about why he wanted to return to Southern Nevada, Caron cited growth, opportunities and relationships. "If you look at where we started as a series of clinics, building the medical center, getting that foundation in place, the right staff, we've really grown up. What fascinates me is how quickly

we've moved to become a level one medical facility, and I think we have the potential to become a level 1A facility. Additionally, the opportunities return to a progressive environment in a unique city, and our established relationships with Nellis Air Force Base, our federal, state and local community partners, and Veterans service organizations really spoke volumes to me."

Prior to assuming his current duties in Southern Nevada, Caron served as the director and CEO of the VA Southern Arizona Health Care System in Tucson, AZ.

He said that opportunity brought him several insights that he will use as the new VASNHS director. "In Tucson, you have a facility that has been around for 90 years, and has an established academic affiliation, community partnership, and research program," he said. "Learning [the importance of] those things in an established facility and the ability to be able to bring that knowledge back here is very exciting."

Caron's immediate goals are to ensure the healthcare system is strategically aligned with the current VA leadership goals and priorities.



VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System Director William J. Caron

"It's a people business," he said. "We are people helping people, at the end of the day. That means relationship building and understanding our secretary's number one priority, which is customer service. It's not our clinical priority, it's 'the' priority."

This also applies to his goals on building rapport within the VASNHS staff.

"Culture is the first thing I want to focus on. I want to spend time with the people and the staff that make this place great," Caron said. "I'd like to get an understanding of the things that we do well and the things that we could do better. I also want to ensure staff to see me and the executive leadership team as their teammates and partners in the great family of our healthcare system and feel they can come to us whenever they need guidance, support and assistance."

As a Veteran as well as an experienced physical therapist, Caron plans to use a lifelong dedication to service in his new role as VASNHS' director.

"I practiced physical therapy for quite a few years as active duty Air Force, and served as a corpsman in the [Navy] reserves, and then went to private sector for 14 years where I learned higher level leadership skills and earned my master's degree in health administration," he said. "But I really missed serving, so 10 years ago I decided that with the VA I can continue to serve my country. And it's been a great fit and I've never looked back."

## VA SOUTHERN NEVADA HCS FY2019 Highlights

**Staffing:**  
2,732 FTE

**65,901**  
**Unique**  
**Patients**

**909,116**  
**Outpatient**  
**Visits**

### Access to Care:

91.64% of scheduled appointments were completed in 30 days or fewer.  
92% were completed within 0-14 days.



Designated a "Pathway to Excellence" facility in September 2019. VASNHS is the ONLY medical facility in Southern Nevada and the first VA medical center in the Southwestern United States to receive this designation.

#BeThere  
Between September 2017 and October 2019, VASNHS completed approximately 481 outreach activities directed at Veterans suicide awareness and prevention.



Partnering with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas' School of Medicine to improve patient care and future services

### ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGE

FY17: 66.42%

FY18: 68.75%

FY19: 70.78%



# Homelessness

## VA supports Las Vegas Veterans at Project Homeless Connect

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) helped support the 25<sup>th</sup> annual Project Homeless Connect in Las Vegas. This initiative brings health care, legal services, and employment opportunities to the impoverished communities in the Las Vegas area.

Offering services ranging from free haircuts to HIV screenings, the event brought dozens of volunteers and more than 150 non-profit organizations to the Cashman Center.

According to a 2018 Southern Nevada Homeless Census and Survey, nearly 25,000 residents will experience homelessness this year. And while their number is decreasing, Las Vegas remains home to the third largest population of homeless Veterans in the nation. VASNHS sent staff from the Las Vegas hospital, as well as local clinics, to enroll new Veterans, provide flu shots, social work, dietary consultation, and even employment services.

One of the most effective weapons in the fight against homelessness, however, is the HPACT.

The VA Homeless Primary Aligned Care Team is a community-based outreach clinic that specializes in homeless Veteran care. The Northeast Primary Care Clinic is the operating base for this team, since most the homeless population in Las Vegas reside nearby. Egosha Odobo, Nurse Practitioner for the HPACT, as well as the only Primary Care Provider for the team, says that they are able to offer a one-stop-shop for the specific care required for homeless Vets.

### More about the fight to end Veteran homelessness across VISN 21:

The HUD-VASH program at VA Palo Alto offers more than 2,500 Section 8 permanent supportive housing vouchers for Veterans in their 10-county catchment area.

Palo Alto's Grant and Per Diem program provides transitional housing in over 200 beds at any one time. There are 100 residential treatment beds at the VA Palo Alto's Menlo Park campus for Veterans seeking help with substance abuse and homelessness.

The VACCHCS Homeless Program



"What we provide, it's not just medical alone; we give them shelter," said Odobo. "We give them 3 square meals a day. And then they have a place to shower, and a place to wash their clothes, while the CRRC (community resource and referral center) is working hard to find them permanent housing, and while their medical needs are covered."

In addition to the normal challenges involved with medical care, there are several unique aspects of dealing with homeless Veterans. Substance abuse is often a concern, says Odobo, but the biggest issue is usually logistical. "They have no way of being contacted. They have no phones, so getting them back is not easy. We have to involve a lot of people within the community to get them back for urgent care or follow-ups for lab results."

Because most homeless Veterans lack access to phones or internet, the HPACT has had to be

flexible with their scheduling. "Every Veteran that comes in for medical care, they are seen the same day," explained Odobo. "In between the scheduled Veterans, if we have someone who walks in, they will be seen. Nobody is being turned away."

The unique mission of the HPACT requires certain personality traits, according to Joseph Yip,

a registered nurse at the Northeast clinic. "It's just about having that openness to work with them where they're at, and not judge them. It's easy start with a lot biases, a lot of preconceptions about working with homeless veterans. I know I did when I started, but the reality is that they are just everyday regular people, some of them just went through difficult situations in life."

"There are a lot of challenges; that's why we need people who have a heart for the homeless Veterans," added Odobo. "And the most rewarding this is when you see someone who had no hope, and now has a lot of hope and a bright future."

VA Pacific Islands Healthcare System's Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Program (HCHV) was honored by the City of Honolulu for the great work they've done for local Veterans.

HCHV has several major programs that help make this possible: Grant and Per Diem offers Veterans "transitional housing" and four different program tracks; bridge housing, low demand, service intensive and clinical. There are a total of 110 program beds; 98 for men and 12 for women.

Emergency Housing offers short-term rapid re-housing of up to three months. There are 11 locations across Oahu, the Neighbor Islands and Guam.

HCHV also conducts annual stand downs, Veterans Justice

Program provides justice related services to incarcerated Veterans and also assistance with Veterans in the court system. Justice related services are available across all the Islands.

Supportive Services for Veterans and Families also provides assistance for Veterans. There are three SSVF grantees with VAPIHCS: US VETS and Catholic Charities operate

on the Hawaiian Islands, and West Care works with Veterans on Guam. HCHV also conducts annual stand downs,



VA Pacific Islands Healthcare System's Homeless Veterans Program was recognized by the Honolulu city council for their work in assisting homeless Veterans in Hawaii.

Homeless summits, and mental health summits in efforts to increase access to services. HCHV staff rotated throughout

the week, going to shelters, and flying out weekly to provide case management and other homeless preventative services. They also

helped to identify veterans who had never registered and others who had been disengaged from VA care for a long time.

## HUD-VASH Vet receives special holiday treat



Hilton Community Projects Manager Jo Licata, left, welcomes Starcia Cousar, center, and her family to the Hilton Hotel San Francisco Union Square for a special holiday stay as part of its adopt-a-family program for Veterans. Photo courtesy of Starcia Cousar.

By Sherri Eng, Public Affairs Officer, San Francisco VA Health Care System

Christmas came early for Starcia Cousar and her family. When she and her four children checked into the upscale Hilton Hotel in San Francisco, they were greeted with warm hugs by staff and escorted to a luxurious two-bedroom suite, complete with a Christmas tree and gifts piled under the tree. For Cousar,

a previously homeless Veteran, it was a dream come true.

"The kids were like, 'Wow!' Just to see their eyes light up when they saw the presents with their names on them was a wonderful feeling," Cousar said.

Through its adopt-a-family program, Hilton San Francisco Union Square

provided Cousar and her children – Eliki, 3 weeks; Max, 7; Chancellor, 10; and Sakura, 12 – holiday gifts and a three-night stay, Dec. 23-26, at the hotel as its way of showing appreciation for local Veterans. In addition to the stay, the hotel also gave Cousar and her family tickets to visit Alcatraz Island, skate at the Yerba Buena Ice Rink and tour the city on Big Bus Tours. Hilton Community Projects Manager Jo Licata worked with Patrick Thompson and Dara Wells-Hajjar, social workers at the San Francisco VA Health Care System, to identify a deserving Veteran.

"We owe our Veterans so much for what they have done for our country," said Licata. "We are so proud of them."

Cousar, 37, served in the U.S. Navy as an aircraft mechanic from 2000-2007 during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq aboard the USS Carl Vinson and USS Nimitz aircraft carriers. Four years ago, she and her then-husband, who is also a Veteran, moved to San Francisco from South Carolina with their three children. The high cost of living in

the Bay Area made it difficult for the family to find a place of their own, so they moved into a room in Cousar's in-laws' home in San Francisco.

Cousar, who suffers from PTSD, learned about and entered the VA's U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program in 2016.

The program, which offers HUD housing vouchers along with VA supportive services, helps homeless Veterans and their families find and sustain permanent housing.

Through the San Francisco VA Health Care System's HUD-VASH program, Cousar was able to move her family into a three-bedroom, two-bath home in the city's Bayview neighborhood. Cousar's social worker Wells-Hajjar provides supportive services to ensure that she maintains her permanent housing.

"There is nothing like having your own space that is safe and secure," said Cousar. "My children now no longer have to worry about moving all the time and now have a place to call home."

# Construction

## Fisher House II Opens at VA Palo Alto

By Kim Betton, VAPAHCS Public Affairs Director & Kerri Childress, VP Communications, Fisher House Foundation

VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) welcomed Fisher House II – a home away from home for military and Veteran families while their loved ones are cared for by the VA. On Feb. 16, 2019, VAPAHCS Director Thomas J. Fitzgerald III, Dave Coker, President of Fisher House Foundation, and Congresswoman Anna Eshoo (18th Congressional District) made the announcement during a special dedication ribbon cutting at the Fisher House site located on the VA Palo Alto campus next door to Fisher House I.

"Family support is an important part of the rehabilitation process. Having two homes now allows even more opportunity for us to provide a place for the families of our Veterans to rest their head without worrying about the financial or logistical burdens of hotels," said Director Fitzgerald. "We cannot stress enough the importance of our partnership with the Fisher House Foundation that made all of this possible."

The new house provides lodging for an additional 20 families of Veterans and military at no cost, allowing them to be close to their loved ones at the most stressful time – during their hospitalization at VA Palo Alto Health Care System. This brings the total number of available nights of lodging at Palo Alto to 40 a night. Savings to military and Veterans' families is more than \$3.387 million per year.

A Fisher House creates an instant community for its residents, united by their common mission of supporting a sick or injured loved one, but also provides each individual with a secure and private refuge after a long day at the hospital to rest and recharge.

"Fisher Houses are built on partnerships. And partnership begins with community," said Dave Coker, President of Fisher House Foundation. "My deepest thanks to the organizations and individual



VA Palo Alto Director Thomas J. Fitzgerald III, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, Fisher House Foundation President Dave Coker and other dignitaries cut ribbon for the second Fisher House.

donors, as well as the staff and Veterans of VA Palo Alto Health Care System, who made today possible. It's what we do together that makes the greatest impact. Thank you for being part of that solution and your support to our military, Veterans and their families."

The new 20-suite, 16,000+ sq.-ft. "comfort home" joins the original Fisher House opened in 2006. Like the first one, this Fisher House was gifted to VA as part of the ceremony. Each bedroom suite comes equipped with a private, handicapped-accessible bathroom. Common areas include a spacious kitchen, large communal living, dining and family rooms, laundry room and patio.

Construction of this Fisher House was supported by: The Otellini Family, The Monks of Monastery,

### FY19 Construction News and Notes:

\$11,828,614 was awarded for clinical expansion at VA San Francisco for a Mental Health and Sleep Lab.

\$2,674,186 was awarded to VA Palo Alto: Upgrade Site and Install USP 800 Modular Compounding Unit.

\$11,902,000 was awarded to construct a Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center at VA Northern California.

\$13,411,019 was awarded to VA Central California to expand their chilled water capacity.

\$12,208,248 was awarded to VA San Francisco to replace mechanical equipment and provide a new chiller plant.

\$16,746,000 was awarded to correct the water system at VA Northern California's Sacramento campus.

\$10,661,005 was awarded for emergency generator replacement for VA Palo Alto's Building 100.



VA Northern California Health Care System Director David Stockwell joins members of the Butte County community in cutting the ribbon commemorating the opening of the new Chico VA outpatient clinic.

Photo by Jon-Nolan Paresa



VA Palo Alto's new community-based outpatient clinic is currently under construction in Stockton, CA. This rendering shows what the facility will look like upon completion. More than \$143M was awarded for the construction of this facility.



Members of the Shasta County community joined VA Northern California leadership at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Redding VA outpatient clinic.

Photo by Jon-Nolan Paresa

# High Reliability Organization

Our Journey to Zero Harm

- In FY19, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) formally embarked on a journey to become a highly reliable organization (HRO), with the goal of Zero Harm.
- Sierra Nevada Health Care System in Reno, was one of 18 HRO Lead Sites, implementing HRO, with the assistance from the National Center for Patient Safety and the Office of Systems Redesign and Improvement.
- High reliability in healthcare means fewer accidents or events of harm, despite operating in a complex, high-risk environment.
- Zero Harm bridges the gap between, "To err is human" and the Hippocratic oath to "Do no harm." Errors will occur, but what we put in place to prevent them from causing harm is what will make us an HRO.

## Our Commitment to High Reliability and Zero Harm

### HRO Pillars, Principles and Values

VA leadership is committed to an enterprise-wide Journey to High Reliability, focusing on **Three pillars** of a high reliability organization (HRO).

**Leadership Commitment:**  
Safety and reliability is reflected in leadership's vision, decisions and actions

**Culture of Safety:** Throughout our organization, safety values and practices are used to prevent harm and learn from mistakes.

**Continuous Process Improvement:** Across the organization, teams use effective tools for continuous learning and improvement.

To become an HRO, we must continuously improve our systems and build a culture of safety.

#### Principles:

- Sensitivity to Operations** means we are mindful of all people, processes and systems that impact patient care.
- Preoccupation with Failure** means we have a laser-sharp focus on catching errors before they happen and predicting and eliminating risks before they cause harm.
- Reluctance to Simplify** means we get to the root causes of a problem, rather than settling for simple explanations.
- Commitment to Resilience** means that we bounce back from mistakes, get back on track, and prevent those mistakes from happening again.
- Deference to Expertise** means we empower and value expertise and diversity of perspectives and insight

Our **Values** Guide our Actions: [It's About the Veteran](#) | [Support a Culture of Safety](#) | [Commit to Zero Harm](#) | [Learn, Inquire and Improve](#) | [Duty to Speak Up](#)

### How Our Journey Will Continue in 2020

- In 2020, HRO implementation is expanding to all sites across VHA. We call this a journey because it does not have an end date. It will become the way we do business, and our strengths as an HRO will continuously improve over time.
- Sierra Nevada Healthcare System, our lead HRO Site, will continue to lead and serve, as a resource for other V21 VAMCs in their implementation of HRO.

 <b>Baseline HRO Training</b>	 <b>Clinical Team Training (CTT)</b>	 <b>Continuous Process Improvement (CPI)</b>
 <b>Site-specific Assessments &amp; Planning</b>	 <b>HRO Leadership Coaching</b>	 <b>Experiential Learning</b>

# VA Police: Protecting and serving America's Heroes



## VA NorCal police officer recognized for saving fellow employee's life

Sgt. Jerry Dennis was recently recognized as the VA Northern California Police Officer of the year for 2019.

Sgt. Dennis is an exemplary employee who always exceeds the expectations of customer service and has a positive attitude towards staff, visitors and our Veterans.

Sgt. Dennis went on to compete at the national level for Lead Sergeant of the year for 2019. The officers who

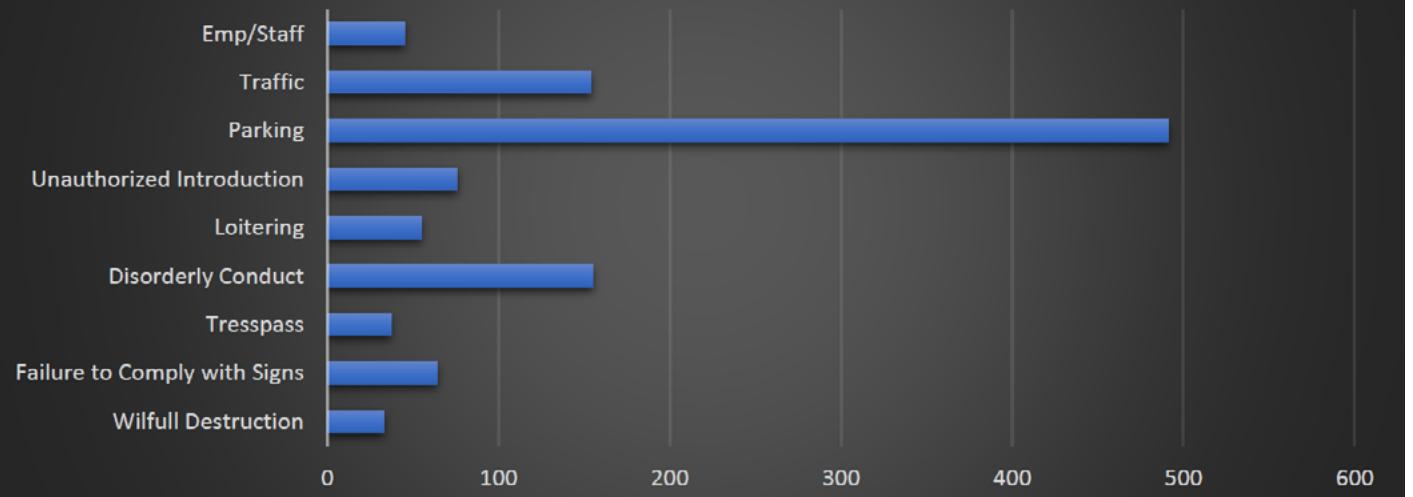
receive this coveted award were recognized at the Chief of Police Symposium held in Little Rock, Arkansas.

On June 5, 2019, Sgt. Dennis assisted in a rapid response, helping to save the life of an employee who was locked inside a room, had fallen, and was unable to get up.

We thank Sgt. Dennis for always providing outstanding service to our employees and Veterans.



### Citation Report by Violation



# Whole Health



Veterans participated in their final class of adaptive T'ai Chi before celebrating with a graduation ceremony and luncheon, provided by Rotary Club of Los Altos. The classes was the first of its kind offering Veterans with spinal cord injuries an opportunity to exercise under the canopy of scenic redwoods trees at Shoup Park, CA. Photo by Adan Pulido

## Whole Health: Making a meaningful difference for Veterans

By Jennifer Childers, VISN 21 Special Populations Program Manager

Among a multitude of other psychological, physical and emotional benefits, Whole Health in the VA promotes community and understanding.

The premise of Whole Health is an approach to health care that empowers and equips people (both Veterans and Staff) to take charge of their health and well-being and live their life to the fullest.

Whole Health is one avenue VA is employing to improve healthcare in the United States. The issues facing healthcare professionals today include, but are not limited to: the staggering monetary costs of chronic conditions that drive 75% of health care expenditures, the opioid crisis and the lack of engagement of the patient to optimize their health, self-care and well-being.

The Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCC&CT) believe the root cause of these issues is the focus on the disease, not the person.

Whole Health aims to change that view at an organizational level. Emphasizing the importance of the relationship between Veterans and their providers is monumental in this transformation of VA health care.

There is no one singular approach to Whole Health, which makes this method of health care so exciting.

This is an exploratory style of health care that starts with a simple question: "What matters to you?"

Whole Health partners with conventional medicine to support healing of the Veteran's ailment, but to also assist, encourage and provide care and resources where they may be suffering or struggling.

It encourages the use of modalities like chiropractic services, massage, hypnosis, biofeedback and yoga to aid in physical recovery, but also focuses on numerous other factors of one's life that can be found in the visual resource Circle of Health.

These eight components can guide the Veteran and their team to focus

on what matters and how to assist them in achieving their individual goals – from weight loss to getting an advanced education.

Veterans can also partner with Peer Specialists and Whole Health Coaches for additional advice and support.

The coaches work with Veterans one-on-one and in group settings to encourage Veterans to develop and achieve self-determined goals related to health and wellness.

They support Veterans in mobilizing internal strengths and external resources, and in developing self-management strategies for making sustainable, healthy lifestyle and behavior changes.

One Veteran who sought guidance is Larry Greene, an Army Veteran who receives care at the VA Central California HCS in Fresno.

Greene suffered from a variety of issues, but mainly struggled with weight management and chronic

pain. Through the Whole Health program, he was paired with Antonio "Tony" Cuyler, Recreational Therapist and Whole Health Coach.

Greene said he "didn't have any accountability" until he met Cuyler.

"Even if I didn't feel like exercising, I had to do it because I knew I'd have to tell Tony about it," Greene admitted.

Thanks to this Whole Health approach, Greene lost weight, became more mobile and decreased his dependency on prescription medications. He credits the Whole Health approach, as well as his determination and Cuyler's encouragement.

"The Whole Health program has really changed my life," he said. Greene encourages other Veterans to seek out Whole Health modalities for the benefit of their own lives.

For more information, visit [the VA program page](#) or contact your facility's Whole Health Program Manager.

# Photos

Right: In October 2018, VA Palo Alto opened their new mammography suite within their Nuclear Medicine department. VAPAHCS leadership cut the ribbon on this space with the first patient. The suite expands access for more than 4,000 women Veterans to receive mammography services with cutting edge 3D technology to help screen for breast cancer. Photo by Adan Pulido



Left: SFVAHCS employees, volunteers and community partners delivered Valentine's Day cards and gift bags to Veterans at the San Francisco VA Medical Center on Feb. 14, 2019. This is part of National Salute to Veteran Patients Week, which is held annually during the week of Valentine's Day. Photo by Jason Dominguez.



Right: VA Pacific Islands HCS Director Jennifer Gutowski, second from right, speaks at Hawaii's first veterans summit. Gutowski was one of the featured speakers at the event, which was held June 21 and 22, 2019 at the Hawaii Convention Center. Other speakers included Hawaii Gov. David Ige, Lt. Gov. Josh Green, and representatives from VBA and NCA. More than 50 Veterans organizations were represented at the event.

# Photos



VA Central California's Community Living Center Nurses recognize National Nurses Week in April, honoring the 4 million nurses working in the US, more than 100,000 of which are VA nurses. *Photo by Kristopher Morrow*



Medical Center Director Chuck Benninger (right) and CEO of Clovis Veterans Memorial District Lorenzo Rios salute the ceremonial wreath, laid at the foot of the Pearl Harbor Monument, December 7, 2019. *Photo by Will McCullough*

# Photos



Left: VA Palo Alto introduced a new state-of-the-art Mobile Medical Unit during the Veterans Town Hall in June 2019, at the American Legion Post 694 in Marina, CA. Whether the Medical Outreach team is connecting an aging Veteran in Modesto with a specialty care provider or giving examinations for homeless Veterans in San Jose, this new addition to its mobile fleet will make it easier to provide crucial services to our Veterans. *Photo by Adan Pulido*



HERT members assist local high school students with simulated casualties donning full bio-hazard suits during a semi-annual preparedness exercise at VA Central California. *Photo by Will McCullough*

## VA Research: Million Veteran Program



The Million Veteran Program (MVP) is a national research program to learn how genes, lifestyle, and military exposures affect health and illness. Since launching in 2011, more than 775,000 Veteran partners have joined one of the world's largest programs on genetics and health. VA Palo Alto's Lawrence Leung, MD, former Chief of Staff, and Philip Tsao, PhD, Associate Chief of Staff for Precision Medicine, have been collaborating for years with Stanford University to engage genomic research to support data collections and scientific discoveries for our Veterans.

Right: Joe Shanks, medical technician, draws a blood sample from Matt Parsons, Air Force Veteran, on Jan. 31, 2019, at the San Francisco VA Medical Center during enrollment in the Million Veteran Program. *Photo by Jason Dominguez*.



## VISN 21 Annual Report FY 2019

This report was assembled by the VISN 21 Public Affairs Office, with assistance from VISN staff and each facility's Public Affairs Office.

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