



INNOVATION • ACCESS • EDUCATION

# 20 ANNUAL 19 REPORT

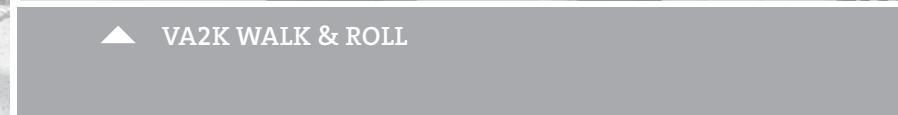
VA



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
*VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System*





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VAPHS Executive Leadership Team: Lovetta Ford (left), Barbara Forsha, Brenda Shaffer, Donald Koenig, Sachin Yende, Ali Sonel and Alan Petrazzi.

## Navy Veteran Takes VAPHS Helm

In May 2019, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) welcomed a new director, Mr. Donald E. Koenig.

A Navy Veteran who served as a lieutenant commander in the Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps, Mr. Koenig brings 20 years of private sector health care leadership experience to VAPHS. He previously served as executive vice president and regional chief operating officer for the nonprofit Mercy Health-Youngstown in Ohio; president of Mercy Health's Saint Elizabeth Youngstown Hospital; and vice president, corporate responsibility and assistant general counsel, Mercy Health.

A southwestern Pennsylvania native, Mr. Koenig holds a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and a Juris Doctor from The George Washington University.

Joining Mr. Koenig on VAPHS' leadership team are:

### **Barbara Forsha, MSN, RN, ET | Deputy Director**

Ms. Forsha previously served as a nurse manager, was appointed deputy director in 2015, and has served in various leadership roles at VAPHS and within VISN 4.

### **Ali Sonel, MD Chief of Staff**

Dr. Sonel previously served as director of VAPHS' cardiac catheterization laboratories and as associate chief of staff for research and development.

### **Lovetta Ford, LCSW Associate Director**

Ms. Ford previously served as Behavioral Health manager and homeless program coordinator for VISN 4.

### **Alan Petrazzi, MPT, MPM, FACHE | Assistant Director**

Mr. Petrazzi previously served as VAPHS operations manager for Primary Care, acting associate director and interim director of VA Butler Healthcare.

### **Brenda Shaffer, DNP, RN- BC, NE-BC Associate Director Patient Care Services**

Dr. Shaffer previously served as acting/interim vice president of VAPHS' Surgery Service and associate director for patient care services and chief nurse executive at two VISN 4 facilities.

### **Sachin Yende, MD Interim Deputy Chief of Staff**

Dr. Sachin Yende also serves as vice president of VAPHS' Critical Care Service.

# Vital Signs

## \$ BUDGET

### \$691.9 Million Allocation

\$582.8M Medical  
\$62.2M Facilities  
\$47M Administrative

### \$38.2 Million Care in the Community

8% decrease from 2018

Paid to non-VA providers for Veterans' care

### \$28.2 Million Dedicated Collections

Revenue from third party private insurance,  
patient copays, etc.



## NETWORK OF CARE

### 2 Medical Centers

University Drive (Oakland)  
H.J. Heinz III (O'Hara Township)

### 5 VA Outpatient Clinics

Beaver, Fayette, Washington, Westmoreland  
counties in PA; Belmont County, OH



## HOSPITAL CAPACITY

### 500 Patient Beds

University Drive  
87 Medicine  
78 Psychiatry  
59 Surgical  
*H.J. Heinz III*  
188 Community Living Center  
88 Veterans Recovery Center



## EMPLOYEES

### 4,066 Total Employees

291 Physicians  
941 Nurses

### 1,274 Veterans

Nearly 1/3 of all VAPHS employees

### 1,534 Student Trainees

### 127 Academic Affiliations



## VETERANS SERVED

### 79,934 Unique Patients

1.6% increase from 2018

### 14,345 Admissions

*Includes Observation, Hospital, CLC and CWT*

### 8,057 Surgical Procedures

4.6% increase from 2018

47 Kidney transplants

8 Living kidney donors

45 Liver transplants

### 758,505 Outpatient Visits

### 35,037 Telehealth Encounters



## WOMEN'S HEALTH

### 6,102 Women Veteran Appointments

799 Mammograms

50 Expecting moms received maternity care

### 79 Newly Enrolled Women Veterans



## SUICIDE PREVENTION

### 153 Outreach Events

### 901 Veterans Crisis Line Calls Answered



## RESEARCH

### 350 Active Projects

### 116 Investigators

### \$16.7 Million Research Funding



## VOLUNTEERS

### 540 Volunteers

30 Youth Volunteers

### 78,722 Volunteer Hours

### \$1.16 Million Donations

*Money, goods and services*

# Spread INNOVATION

## Device To Receive Canadian Patent

### Self-Heating Probe Improves Test Accuracy



Respiratory therapist and VAPHS inventor Cathy Abee (center) and co-workers display Abee's heated pulse oximeter probe.

A medical device invented by a VA Pittsburgh respiratory therapist will soon receive a Canadian patent. A U.S. patent was granted for the device in 2017, and a European patent is pending.

The device is a heated pulse-oximeter probe that improves the accuracy of blood oxygen and heart rate measurements in patients with poor circulation and breathing difficulties. It uses a chemical energy heating source to warm a patient's finger, forehead, foot, ear or toe prior to measurement. The warmer the extremity, the more accurate the measurement.

Catherine "Cathy" Abee developed the idea for the device when she could not obtain a blood-oxygen measurement from an elderly, frail patient she treated at a hospital where she previously worked. When

she joined VA in 2008, she began working with her colleagues in the cardiac catheterization lab to make the device a reality.

With funding and assistance from VA's Technology Transfer Program (TTP), Abee partnered with the Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL) to refine her invention. TTP works with inventors to further develop their inventions, protect those inventions and bring them to public use through agreements that benefit VA and each invention's manufacturer.

At least two companies, including one that is Veteran owned, have expressed interest in producing the device to be marketed to health care providers.



#### Heated Pulse Oximeter QUICK FACTS

**One patent issued, two pending**

**Lasts 6–8 hours**

**Simple to use**

## Presurgery Tool Measures Frailty, Saves Lives

A VA Pittsburgh surgeon and Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion (CHERP) core investigator developed a lifesaving presurgery practice for frail Veterans. Dr. Daniel Hall and his colleagues over a period of several years developed the Risk Analysis Index, or RAI. The tool measures frailty, a type of physical weakness common in older adults.

RAI is a 30-second, 12-question survey that focuses on weakness, nutrition, shortness of breath and difficulties with eating, bathing, walking and other activities of daily living. It helps elderly Veterans and clinicians decide on presurgery interventions, such as strength training, or even whether to proceed with surgery. Statistics show

one in three Veterans who are found to be "very frail" are at risk of dying within six months of surgery.

The tool tripled frail Veterans' surgery survival rates, dropping the mortality rate from 25% to 8%. Through 2019, it has been performed 8,000 times at VAPHS and more than 350,000 times at neighboring UPMC. It has since spread to VA medical centers in Arizona, Georgia and California.

Hall in 2019 was named one of 15 finalists who were invited to Washington, D.C., to present their innovations at the Veterans Health Administration's Shark Tank Competition in October. Finalists had two minutes each to pitch their practices to network and VA medical center directors for a chance to launch

**The tool tripled frail Veterans' surgery survival rates, dropping the mortality rate from 25% to 8%.**

their innovations at new facilities.

Following Hall's pitch, Iowa City VA Medical Center chose to implement the clinical tool and it was named a Gold Status practice. As the Gold Status Fellow for his practice, Hall will spend six months working with Iowa to implement the practice at their facility. Plans are also on track to spread the tool across VISN 4 and to VA medical centers in Florida, Virginia and Michigan.



## Physician Researcher Receives PECASE

VA Pittsburgh physician and Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion core investigator Dr. Walid Gellad was named a recipient of a Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE), the highest honor awarded by the federal government to outstanding science and engineering professionals.

Dr. Gellad's research helps VA shape policies to reduce the negative impacts of dual care while maintaining the benefits, specifically among Veterans who receive prescriptions simultaneously in and outside VA.

## 3D Printing Powers Innovations

3D printing continued to accelerate development of accessibility devices for Veterans in 2019. One of the newest inventions made possible with 3D printing is a computer mouse for Veterans who use prosthetic hooks.

VA engineers at the Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL) use 3D printing to create parts for inventions such as the computer mouse and PneuChair, a wheelchair powered solely by compressed air. 3D printing manufactures parts for the devices that otherwise are unavailable.

HERL is a collaboration between VAPHS, the University of Pittsburgh and UPMC. Nearly every HERL accessibility device uses parts created with 3D printing. Also

known as additive manufacturing, 3D printing uses a computer aided design (CAD) file to produce complex, functional shapes using less material than traditional manufacturing.

VAPHS is one of over 25 VA medical facilities that use 3D printing to advance innovations in surgery, prosthetics and treatment of chronic illness.

**One of 25+ VA medical facilities that use 3D printing**

# Expanded ACCESS

## Outpatient Clinics Relocated

New Spaces Expand Services



VAPHS Director Donald E. Koenig (center), joins VISN 4 Deputy Network Director Charles R. Thilges, (left), VAPHS Chief of Staff Dr. Ali Sonel, VAPHS Deputy Director Barbara Forsha and Valor Healthcare President Dr. Scott Wise, U.S. Rep. Guy Reschenthaler, and Valor's Washington County Clinic Director Dr. Colleen Laughlin in cutting the ribbon during the grand re-opening of the Washington County VA Outpatient Clinic.

We relocated three of our five outpatient clinics in 2019 to better serve Veterans who do not live near our medical centers in Pittsburgh and O'Hara Township. The relocated clinics in Belmont County, Ohio, and Fayette and Washington counties in Pennsylvania moved to larger, more modern spaces that expanded telehealth services and added specialty services.

The clinics are designed to support VA's Veteran-centered model of care, Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs).

Each individualized PACT puts Veterans at the center of their care team. Care teams include a provider, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, dietitians and other clinicians.

In each clinic, private exam rooms surround a separate clinical area where staff communicate. The overall layout enhances privacy and safety and simplifies clinic navigation.

We relocated the Beaver County clinic in 2017. Long-term plans call for the Westmoreland County outpatient clinic to relocate, as well.

### NEW OUTPATIENT SPECIALTY SERVICES\*

**Acupuncture**

**Audiology**

**Cardiology Holter monitor placement**



**Chiropractic**

**Pharmacy consultation (no pharmacy)**

**Physical therapy services (limited)**

\*Some services not available at all clinics.

## SECOND FISHER HOUSE ANNOUNCED

The Fisher House Foundation in 2019 selected our H.J. Heinz III campus in O'Hara Township for a second Fisher House. Fisher Houses provide temporary accommodations at no charge

for the families and caregivers of Veterans receiving VA care. Since 2012, our first, 10-suite Fisher House at University Drive has often reached capacity. As a result, the nonprofit Friends

# WAIT TIME SNAPSHOT

Average wait time for established patients for fiscal year 2019



**4.9 Days**

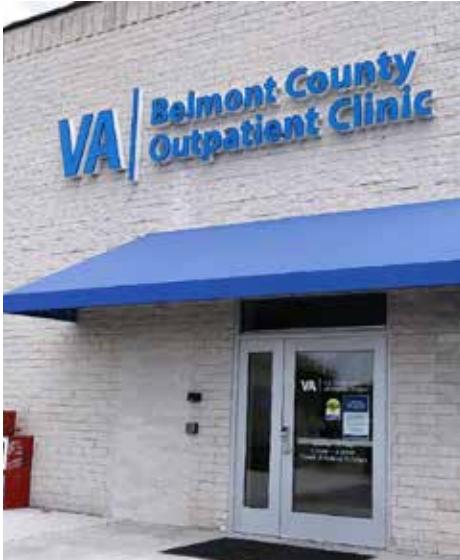
Primary Care

**8.2 Days**

Specialty Care

**3 Days**

Mental Health Care



## BELMONT COUNTY

- 16,000 square feet
- 5,200+ Veterans served
- 3 new services added

## WASHINGTON COUNTY

- 21,000 square feet
- 4,600+ Veterans served
- 2 new services added

## FAYETTE COUNTY

- 16,000 square feet
- 3,400+ Veterans served
- 5 new services added

## BELMONT PROVIDES HEART MONITORS

Near the end of the fiscal year, our Belmont County Outpatient Clinic launched its new Holter monitor service. Holter monitors are battery-operated, portable devices for measuring heart activity. Previously, Veterans who needed this 24-hour monitoring device drove over 90 minutes to see cardiologists at our University Drive campus. Now, many receive the monitor in Belmont, often on the same day it is ordered. We plan to roll out this service to all our outpatient clinics in 2020.



of the Pittsburgh Fisher House pays to lodge family members in nearby Family Houses. Family Houses provide lodging for patients and their families who are in Pittsburgh for medical care.



**16 SUITES**

**COMPLETION DATE TBD**

Friends of the Pittsburgh Fisher House has initiated fundraising.

## CVT Extends Low-Vision Care to Erie and Saves Veterans Travel to Pittsburgh

Veterans in northwestern Pennsylvania with vision loss can now receive specialized, low-vision rehabilitation services close to home using Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT).

Staff at VA Pittsburgh and Erie VA Medical Center in 2019 began to work together to integrate services using CVT. CVT uses real-time, interactive video conferencing to assess, treat and provide health care to a patient remotely.

Under the new program, staff in Erie assess Veterans for visual devices and skills that will help them perform daily living activities and increase their independence. Staff in Pittsburgh then use CVT to provide the Veterans with ongoing, low-vision occupational therapy to help them meet their goals. Using CVT saves Erie Veterans the two-hour plus drive to Pittsburgh.

### Low-Vision Clinical Video Telehealth QUICK FACTS

**14 CVT appointments**

between Pittsburgh and Erie

**13 Veterans served**

## On-the-Go Care with VA Video Connect Secure App for Online Care



Veterans can now see VAPHS providers from anywhere with VA Video Connect (VVC). VVC uses an encrypted virtual connection to allow Veterans quick and easy access to health care from any mobile or web-based device.

In 2019, Veterans who benefited from VVC included an over-the-road truck driver and a work-from-home IT specialist. When the truck driver called to cancel a face-to-face appointment

because he was in Ohio, we converted the appointment to VVC. The driver used a cell phone to connect with his VAPHS provider from the privacy of his truck cab at a rest stop. For the IT specialist, our staff set up VVC appointments in the Veteran's home to avoid work-scheduling conflicts.

We now provide VVC appointments for care in nearly 30 primary and mental health services.

### VVC SERVICES AT VAPHS

- Primary Care
- Mental Health Care
- Wound Care
- Pharmacy
- Home-Based Primary Care
- Audiology
- Speech
- Low Vision
- Cardiology
- Telediabetes
- Renal
- Dialysis
- Sleep
- Vascular Surgery
- Urology
- Ear, Nose, Throat (ENT)
- Palliative Care
- Weight Management
- Hepatology
- Recreation Therapy
- Infectious Disease
- Rheumatology
- Neurology
- Chaplain Services
- Social Work
- Vocational Rehab
- Caregiver Program



### TELEHEALTH SNAPSHOT

**35,037**  
Telehealth Encounters

**15,754**  
Telemental Health Care Encounters

# Virtual Cancer Care Network is First of its Kind



VA Pittsburgh oncologist Dr. Vida Passero demonstrates telehealth technology used in Pittsburgh to provide cancer treatment to Veteran patients in Altoona. Passero proposed the groundbreaking clinic, which opened in January 2018.

Our Virtual Cancer Care Network in 2019 saved 151 Veterans in central Pennsylvania the five-hour round-trip drive to Pittsburgh to receive oncology services.

## Clinical Video Telehealth links cancer patients in Altoona with oncology specialists in Pittsburgh

The first of its kind in the nation, the groundbreaking clinic began seeing patients at the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center in Altoona in 2018. Led by VAPHS oncologist Dr. Vida Passero, the clinic uses Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) to link cancer patients

in Altoona with oncology specialists in Pittsburgh. A form of telehealth, CVT uses real-time, interactive video conferencing to assess, treat and provide care to patients remotely.

During appointments, Altoona staff use high-definition medical cameras to send images and live video to an oncology team in Pittsburgh. Patients in Altoona see and talk with their Pittsburgh-based providers on a TV screen as they receive chemotherapy, undergo cancer surveillance or meet with a certified registered nurse practitioner for cancer survivorship.

Telehealth staff in both locations assist hematologists, oncologists, pharmacists and palliative providers in Pittsburgh during the virtual visits. Nursing, pharmacy and internal medicine staff provide the hands-on care to patients in Altoona.



## Virtual Cancer Care AT A GLANCE

**151 Patients**  
seen in fiscal year 2019

**200 Total Patients**  
participated in the program  
since it began in 2018

**717 Appointments**  
in fiscal year 2019

**1,207 Total Appointments**  
since the program started

**15,704**  
Unique Veterans Used  
Secure Messaging

**1,803**  
Unique Veterans  
Served Via e-consult

**11+**  
Telehealth  
Services Offered

# Improved EDUCATION

## New Simulation Center Opens

Provides Safe Learning Environment



### Simulation Center AT A GLANCE

**1,569**  
Learners

**5,129**  
Simulation hours

**45**  
Courses offered

**266**  
Classes held

**\$230,000**  
CEU cost savings\*

In 2019, we opened a \$5.4 million simulation center that mimics our hospitals' clinical spaces, including an operating room and inpatient and outpatient procedure rooms. The 4,400-square-foot center provides physicians, nurses, residents, fellows, medical and nursing students and other staff with a safe, risk-free place to practice hands-on medical procedures and communication skills.

The state-of-the-art simulation center serves a critical role in improving Veterans health care: Staff who practice high-stress medical procedures together perform better when presented with real-life stressors. The center also allows us to offer our licensed clinical staff in-house training and continuing education unit (CEU) credits.

Our simulation team will partner with EMS to develop training for our

Environmental Management Services staff in hospital disinfection to reduce the risk of hospital-acquired infection.

Simulation equipment includes but is not limited to full-size adult manikins and high-fidelity virtual reality simulators. We use standardized patients—actors trained to portray patients—to train staff in communication skills.

Types of simulation center activities include skills training, assessment, team training, practice, individualized curriculum, and process simulation.

Veterans also benefit directly. A new simulation trains Veterans to administer naloxone to someone who has overdosed, which can save lives. Naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan, reverses the effects of an opioid overdose.

\*Includes savings from in-house, simulation center accredited trainings and various other courses and conferences held at VAPHS in fiscal year 2019.



## Training Promotes Post-Surgery Safety Emergence Delirium Linked to PTSD

Anesthesia and education staff prepared in 2019 for the national launch of a VAPHS-developed quality improvement training program for safely managing post-anesthesia emergence delirium.

Emergence delirium is agitation and aggressive behavior when emerging from anesthesia. Veterans with PTSD are at higher risk of emergence delirium. The training outlines steps to take to keep staff and patients safe when Veterans are delirious upon waking from surgery.

The program earned \$10,000 in Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Investment

Program funds in December 2018 and includes the course, "Emergency Delirium: Maintaining Veteran and Employee Safety." Training is held monthly in our new simulation center's operating room and is on track for deployment to VA facilities nationally.

In 2019, staff presented the program at annual meetings of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority, Association of Veterans Affairs Nurse Anesthetists, National Association for Healthcare Quality, VA Pittsburgh's Best Practices and VA's Shark Tank competition.

## Program Trains Community Providers to Help Vietnam Veterans in End-of-Life Care

We became one of just 20 VA facilities nationwide in 2019 to train community health care providers to help Vietnam-era Veterans on hospice who may be struggling with PTSD, moral injury or thoughts of suicide.

Research shows some Vietnam-era Veterans experience psychological problems and have a wide range of life-adjustment issues. With time, aging combat Veterans revisit wartime experiences to find meaning. The Empower Staff and Community Hospices in the Care of Vietnam-Era Veterans initiative allows VA mental health specialists, chaplains, social workers and other experts to educate community hospice providers who serve Vietnam Veterans who may be struggling with painful memories of their service.

The training helps community providers identify departments,

programs and services that best support Veterans and their families in end-of-life or palliative care. It also helps families better understand what their loved one is experiencing.

Since the training began in June, we have trained 176 non-VA staff in community facilities, including physicians, executive directors, social workers, nurses, volunteers, coordinators and chaplains.

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**3 Areas of Focus:**  
PTSD, moral  
injury and suicide  
prevention

**15 Counties**  
represented at  
trainings



# Recognized Leader in Health Care Quality

## Awards and Accomplishments

VA in September declared the **effective end of Veteran homelessness** in 20 western Pennsylvania counties, including four we serve: **Washington, Westmoreland, Greene and Fayette**. VA in 2017 declared an effective end to Veteran homelessness in the city of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.



Our University Drive and H.J. Heinz III campuses each received **2019 Practice Greenhealth System for Change awards**. The awards recognize health systems that actively work to reduce their environmental footprint.

**Dr. Richard Stone**, VHA executive in charge, visited VAPHS to attend VAPHS' innovators/inventors fair; to discuss supply chain strategies; and to celebrate the **25th Anniversary of HERL, the Human Engineering Research Laboratories**, a joint venture between VA, the University of Pittsburgh and UPMC.

VAPHS staff took home **four gold, two silver and one bronze** from the **2019 Federal Executive Board Excellence in Government** awards competition.

**Michael Fine, MD, MSc**, received the **2018 Daniel Deykin Award for Outstanding Mentor**, presented annually to a VA researcher who exhibits outstanding dedication and skill in mentoring the next generation of researchers whose work positively impacts Veterans.

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History and the **U.S. Patent and Trademark Office** recognized **Rory Cooper, Ph.D.**, with his own trading card. Dr. Cooper is the director of the Human Engineering and Research Laboratories, whose work is pushing the boundaries for mobility-challenged Veterans.

The Human Rights Campaign's Healthcare Equality Index designated us an **LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader for the seventh consecutive year**. Leaders meet or exceed HEI criteria for providing inclusive and equitable care to LGBTQ patients and their families.

Our staff donated **5,568 pounds of food and cleaning items** to the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank during the **Feds Feed Families food drive**.

We finished 2019 with a **90% insurance capture rate** for non-service-connected care, **one of the highest in the nation**. We apply health insurance reimbursements to Veterans' copays and toward enhancing medical services for all Veterans.

## Accreditations

### The Joint Commission

Hospital, home care, behavioral health and opioid substitution therapy. The accreditation is a known universal symbol of quality.

### Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs

Research program.

### Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International

Research program.

### Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)

Behavioral health, employment and community services, intensive rehabilitation, interdisciplinary pain rehabilitation and intermediate low vision programs. The accreditation is recognized as an assurance of quality care provided by health and human services organizations.

### American College of Radiology

Radiation/oncology department.



# 92.5%

of VAPHS patients surveyed

trust us to fulfill our nation's commitment to Veterans.





In fiscal year 2019, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System **served Veterans from all 50 states, plus Puerto Rico, Palau, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the District of Columbia.**

From as few as 4 from Wyoming to as many as 5,300 from West Virginia, Veterans from all over America trusted VAPHS for their health care.

- 1,000+ from Florida
- Nearly 700 from Georgia
- 250+ from Minnesota
- 250+ from New Jersey
- 400 from New York
- 450+ from Tennessee
- Nearly 1,500 from Texas
- 300+ from Virginia
- 5,300+ from West Virginia

VA



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

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[www.pittsburgh.va.gov](http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov)

*Shown are 10 of the dozens of Veterans who spoke with us about their military service during our Faces of Service events in 2018 and 2019. We provided each participant with a copy of their portrait and shared their personal stories of service on social media. We honor them and all who served.*

Connect  
with us!



VAPHS



VAPittsburgh

