

VA HEALTHCARE—VISN 4 ANNUAL REPORT

2020



VA

U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health
Administration
VA Healthcare—
VISN 4



MESSAGE FROM THE NETWORK DIRECTOR



Timothy W. Liezert
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Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of VISN 4:

I am pleased to present the 2020 VISN 4 Annual Report. Within these pages, we tell the stories of a caring, professional staff who overcame COVID-19's challenges to keep Veterans safe while continuing to provide the excellent care they earned and deserve.

During this difficult and unprecedented year, we expanded our connected care and mental health programs, continued to develop the eastern and western markets, moved closer toward achieving our goal of becoming a High Reliability Organization, expanded our Caregiver Support Program, and improved our customer service. With the continued dedication of our staff and the support of our Veterans service officers and community, I know we will continue to be successful and overcome any challenges that 2021 brings.

With the coronavirus not yet vanquished, I encourage all of you to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you are eligible. If you are a Veteran, you can stay up to date on the vaccine's rollout on VA's website at www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine. You can even sign up to stay informed about the vaccine and to tell us if you wish to receive it. Signing up helps us plan vaccine distribution, but you do not have to sign up to get the vaccine: As supply increases and we move through the distribution plan, your VA care team will contact you to let you know of your options.

On behalf of our VISN 4 leadership team, I thank all Veterans and their families for continuing to use VISN 4 for their health care needs. Please stay safe, continue to wear your face coverings, keep your distance, wash your hands often and get vaccinated!

It is our honor and privilege to serve you.

Sincerely,

Timothy W. Liezert
Network Director, VISN 4



(L-R) VISN 4 Network Director Timothy Liezert, U.S. Secretary for Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie and Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center Director Karen Flaherty-Oxler tour the medical center campus in Philadelphia on July 21.

Period of Service

3% World War II

7% Korean War

5% Post-Korean War

Vietnam Era 42%

12% Post-Vietnam Era

Persian Gulf War 27%

7% OEF, OIF, New Dawn

WHO WE SERVE

300,307 Veterans



90%
271,513 Men



10%
28,792 Women



	<25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
By Age	1,679	18,147	25,586	29,496	47,224	92,315	52,092	33,765
	0.6%	6.0%	8.5%	9.8%	15.7%	30.7%	17.3%	11.2%

Unique Veterans, includes all Veterans,
Non-Veterans and Pharmacy-only patients.

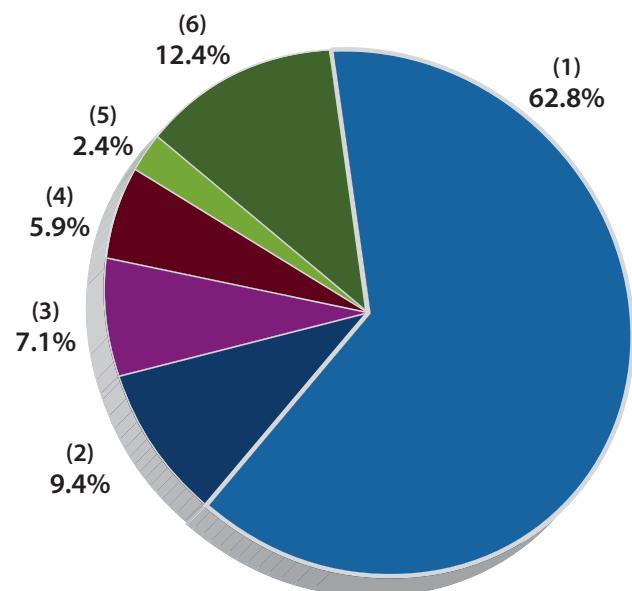


OPERATING STATISTICS

Operating Budget

1) Salary and Benefits	\$1,707,849,000
2) Services.....	\$255,164,401
3) Consolidated Mail-out Pharmacy	\$194,217,871
4) Drugs and Medicines.....	\$161,805,000
5) Equipment.....	\$65,564,000
6) All Other Costs	\$336,300,728
TOTAL.....	\$2,720,901,000

Medical Care
Collection Fund.....\$114,905,000
Lands and Structures.....\$59,613,836

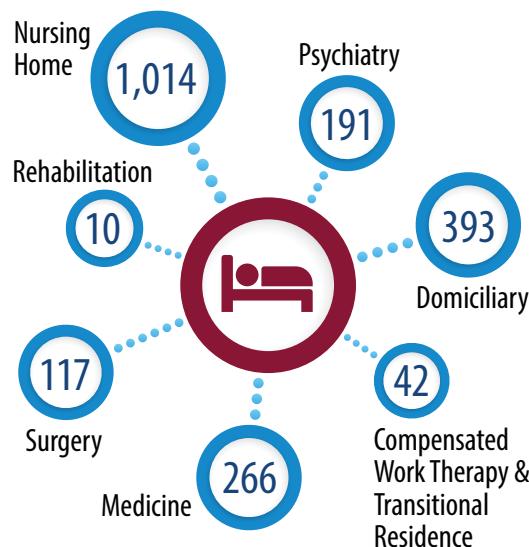


Research

Total Funding for Research	\$26,558,747
Investigators.....	221
Projects	601

Operating Beds

Total Number of Beds.....	2,033
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Workforce

Total Number of Employees.....	15,277
Physicians.....	1,130
Veterans	3,921
Nurses.....	3,164

Volunteers

Total Volunteer Hours.....	224,507
Volunteers.....	2,413
Avg. Hours	93

Workload

Inpatient Admissions.....	19,620
Outpatient Visits.....	3,389,221
Prescriptions Filled	12,564,692
Surgical Procedures	16,324



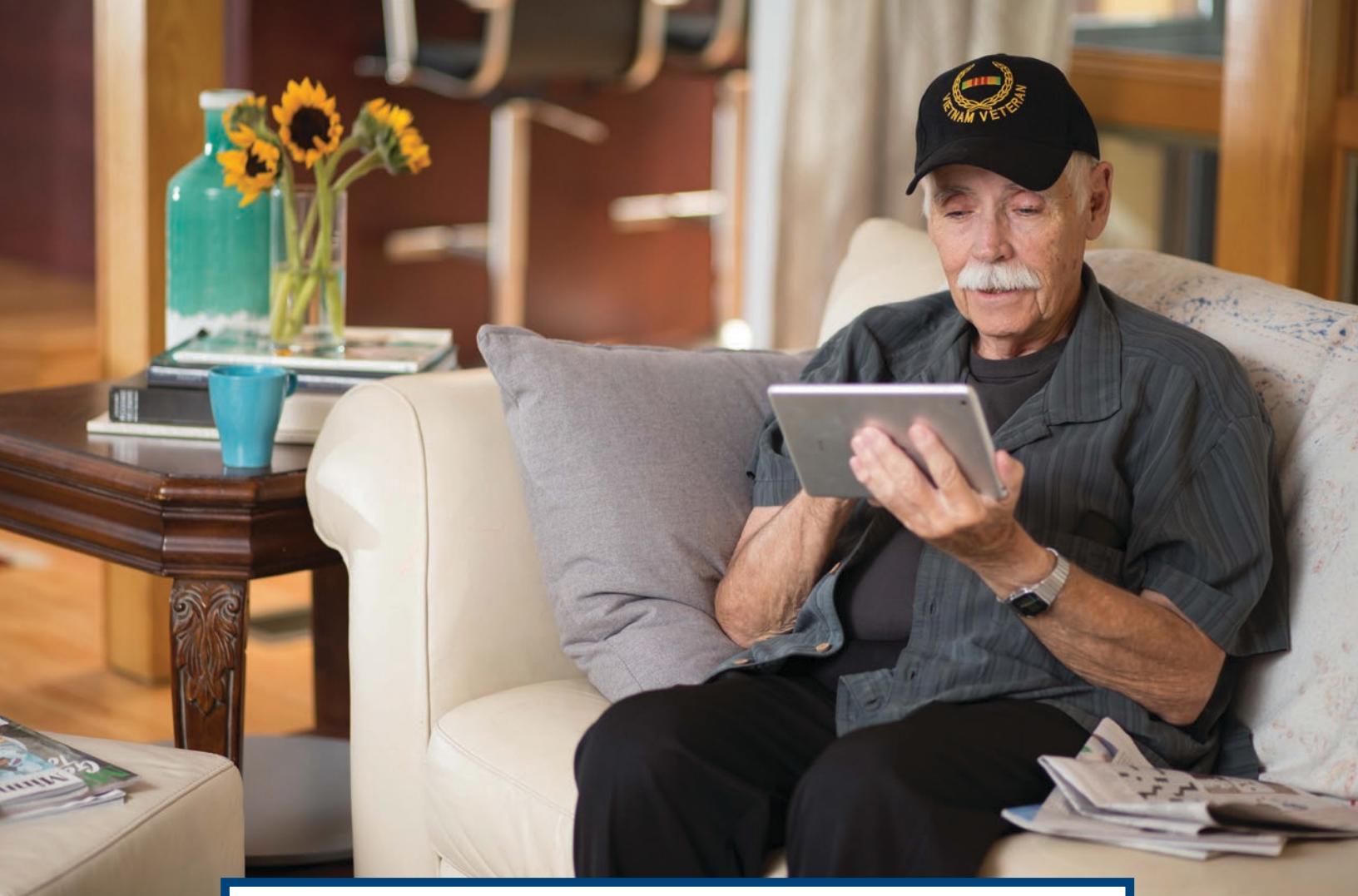
GIFTS AND DONATIONS

Items.....	\$2,454,674.83
Monetary	\$740,925.16
Activity	\$230,345.60
Total Value	\$3,425,945.59

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Voluntary Service received an exception to permit donations for VA employees working during this crisis. Items donated were mostly food items and luncheons for patient care departments, face masks, face shields, etc.

The communities in VISN 4 have been extremely supportive of VA employees working on the front lines during the pandemic. **The total value of donations in VISN 4 specifically related to COVID-19 was \$684,637.64!**





KEEPING YOU CONNECTED

Telehealth

During fiscal year 2020, our connected care programs proved to be extremely valuable. Our staff worked hard to support providers and patients as they relied more on virtual modalities to deliver and receive care. By the end of the fiscal year, 16,000 more patients, or 25% of all patients served by VISN 4, had at least one telehealth visit.

The rapid expansion of the VA Video Connect (VVC) application allowed Veterans to receive care from home and reduced their risk of exposure to COVID-19. Compared to the previous year, 35,000 more patients completed a virtual video visit. Despite the growth of virtual care, patients gave high satisfaction scores when surveyed on their virtual experience.

Home Telehealth

Our home telehealth program assists Veterans in managing their chronic diseases all while in the comfort of their home using in-home monitoring systems and/or video technology. Since the beginning of the pandemic, our home telehealth team has triaged care and educated Veterans infected with COVID-19. In fact, most of our medical centers in VISN 4 offered extended weekend coverage.

For fiscal year 2020, our home telehealth program serviced more than 6,400 patients and conducted over 1,300 video visits to support the management of COVID-19 and other various chronic conditions.

My HealtheVet

My HealtheVet (MHV) is VA's online personal health record that empowers Veterans, service members and their dependents to take an active role in managing their health care. MHV users can review, refill, and track VA prescriptions; send secure messages; view, print and download portions of their medical record; and request VA appointments.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, secure messaging became one of the top virtual tools for patients and staff. More than 134,000 Veterans or 43% of patients in VISN 4 are registered to use MHV, and more than 448,000 secure messages were sent and received, an increase of 33% from the prior year.

Veterans can also view their COVID-19 test results online. Once the test results are verified and confirmed by the VA lab, the results are placed in the patient's medical record and available immediately in their My HealtheVet Premium Account. Veterans will be contacted directly by their VA provider if they receive a positive COVID-19 test result.

Annie

Annie is VA's automated texting system that supports Veterans in self-care by sending reminders to track and submit health information. It also encourages patient wellness through motivational and educational messages. More than 1,000 patients across VISN 4 are enrolled in the Annie system for various programs including cardiac rehabilitation, home telehealth, MOVE, nutrition, physical therapy, primary care, social work, and smoking cessation.

Annie played an important role during the pandemic by developing text messages and reminders for Veterans. Veterans can use Annie's Coronavirus Precautions protocol messages to help monitor their viral symptoms and know when to contact their VA care team for additional care. The messages also provide Veterans with general wellness tips and precautions to prevent contracting the coronavirus.



BEST PRACTICES

Tele Urgent Care

VISN 4 implemented the Tele Urgent Care program that served more than 2,600 Veterans through video and phone to meet the urgent needs of Veterans.



Replacement Appointments through VEText

VISN 4 developed a process with the national VEText office to automatically offer patients the opportunity by using text messages to reschedule as a VA Video Connect appointment when they cancel their face-to-face appointments.



Home-based Primary Care

The Home-based Primary Care Program traditionally relied on face-to-face care to support Veterans in the management of their chronic conditions in their home. Due to the pandemic, VISN 4 incorporated virtual care into the HBPC practice and served more than 1,200 patients using VA Video Connect.



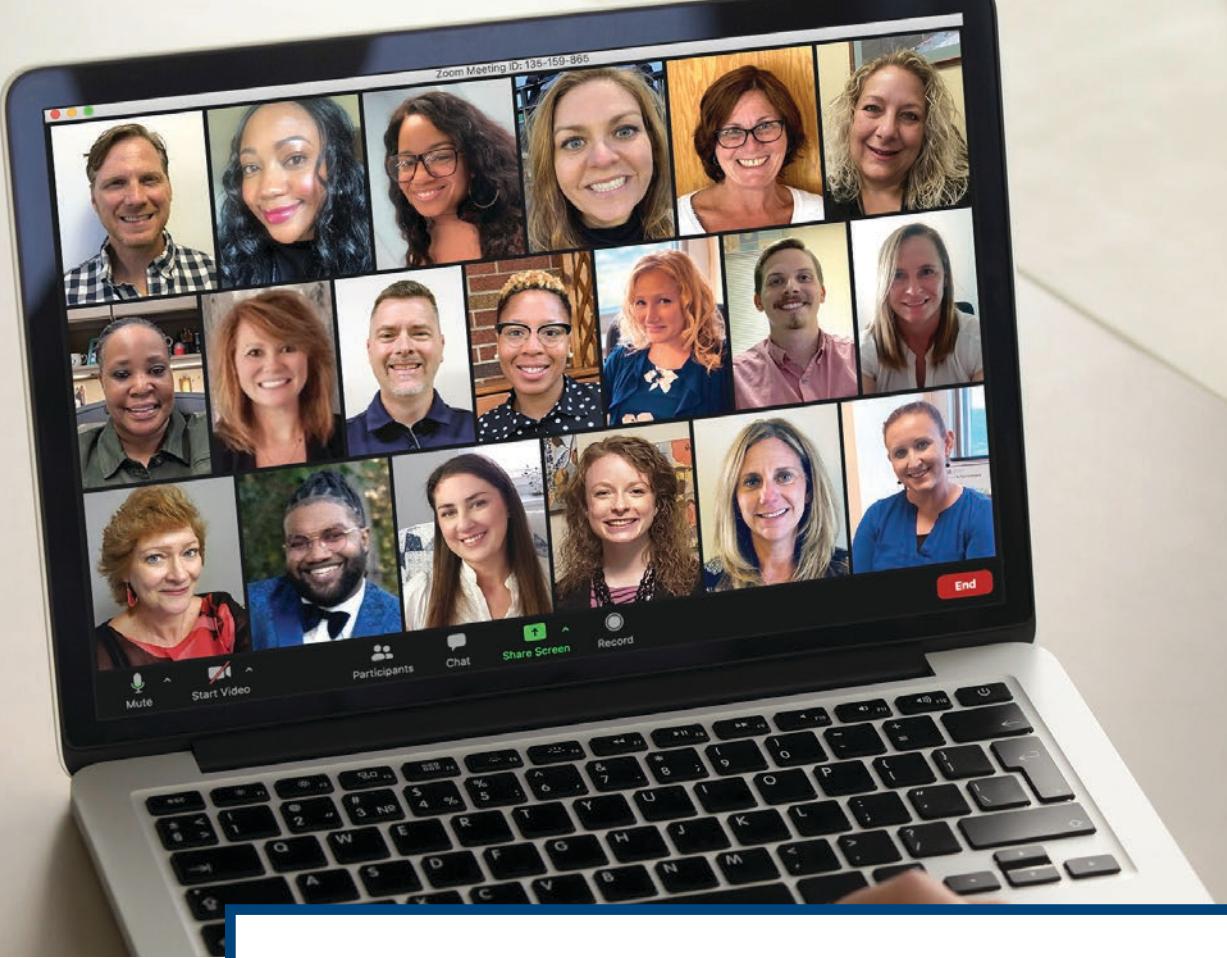
My HealtheVet Assistance

Facility My HealtheVet coordinators began using VA Video Connect to assist Veterans with registering for a My HealtheVet account, upgrading to Premium level, providing education, and troubleshooting. Last fiscal year, our MHV coordinators conducted more than 1,700 VA Video Connect sessions to help Veterans.



**1-833-TELE-URGENT
(1-833-835-3874)**

www.visn4.va.gov/tele-urgent



ENGAGING OUR EMPLOYEES

Leadership Development Institute

On September 18, 2020, 17 students (pictured above) graduated from the VISN 4 Leadership Development Institute (LDI). Due to the pandemic, there was no opportunity for face-to-face networking and collaboration. The program was completely restructured by reorganizing the content and presenters to ensure the highest-quality virtual program.

The participants experienced several unique challenges during the program year. Despite technology challenges and altered project scopes, the graduates excelled with implementing process improvement projects. Many projects involved telehealth, VA Video Connect (VVC), and other virtual collaborations allowing facilities to meet the needs of our Veterans in real time, while also delivering on meeting the Secretary's priorities.

Congratulations to the VISN 4 LDI class of FY20!

All Employee Survey Results

Last year more than 10,000 VISN 4 employees (or 68%) completed the All Employee Survey. Employees across the network shared their opinions about their current work environment as well as provided feedback to improve satisfaction in key areas.



This year's results indicate that employees understand how their work helps to achieve VA's goals, and that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish those goals. Employees expressed a sense of personal accomplishment, and they also recommend VA as a good place to work.

The Best Places to Work Score for VISN 4 improved to 71, exceeding the overall VHA average. The score measures three areas of employee perception: overall job satisfaction; satisfaction with the organization; and likelihood of recommending VA as a good place to work.

Live Whole Health.

Integrating Your Health Care

With restrictions on face to face care, VISN 4 quickly transitioned many existing whole health offerings to virtual or phone-based formats using VA Video Connect. Several sites also used Facebook Live to make whole health, complementary and integrative health classes, and movement-based interventions available to Veterans and their caregivers.

We also created new classes focusing on COVID-related stressors. For example, Wilmington VA created a virtual workshop that provided education and skills to assist Veterans with maintaining their self-care and wellness during quarantine. In addition, Coatesville VA offered a multi-session series on healthy parenting via Facebook Live. The series was facilitated by a chaplain to help Veterans

utilize healthy coping skills during increased stress.

Additionally, VISN 4 purchased unlimited access for Veterans to Ompractice, an online platform offering live classes in yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, and Qi Gong. Ompractice offers an extensive schedule of classes for a variety of skill levels, as well as specific classes for Veterans.



Taking Care of Our Employees

Self-care is essential to the health and resiliency of our workforce, but many staff found their established routines disrupted when gyms and fitness studios closed. As an added benefit for staff, VISN 4 purchased an unlimited membership to Ompractice, and last year, 941 employees signed up for 2,577 classes.

One employee remarked, "This (Ompractice) has been a great support during COVID, when my gym and other social activities are not available. I still feel like I am part of a community and can keep a routine."

Whole Health also hosted a network-wide virtual 5K entitled "Together Every Step of the Way." More than 550 employees from across VISN 4 participated in the event that helped foster a sense of community during isolation, cultivate a culture of gratitude and resilience, and spread the message of whole health.



ENHANCING YOUR EXPERIENCE



The VISN 4 Patient Experience Program seeks to identify and enhance opportunities to improve the health care experience for Veterans, their families and caregivers.

The program also coordinates the patient advocate program to help Veterans obtain resolution to care issues or challenges. In fiscal year 2020, we successfully implemented a new tracking system to ensure that Veterans' complaints were addressed within an average of six days.

Veterans' trust in VISN 4 care has remained among the highest three VISNs in the country, even during the first nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Two VISN 4 facilities—Altoona and Butler—received awards for excellence in patient experience during the 2020 VA Patient Experience Awards Ceremony. In all, five VISN 4 facilities were also recognized at the event.



IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE

In fiscal year 2020, our VISN 4 medical centers scheduled more than 2 million primary, specialty, and mental health care appointments. More than 95% of appointments were completed within 30 days of the Veteran's preferred date, and the average wait time was 5.1 days.

Clinics	Number of Appointments	Wait Time <30 days (#)	Wait Time <30 days (%)	Average Wait (days)
All Clinics	2,000,005	1,901,195	95.7%	5.1
Mental Health	242,966	235,192	97.7%	3.3
Primary Care	363,241	355,487	97.9%	3.5
Specialty Care	620,466	563,144	95.7%	8.2

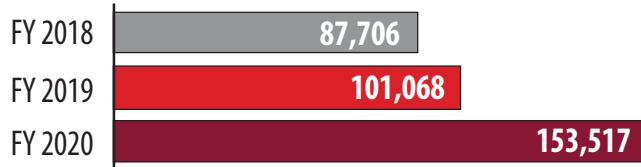
The number of unique Veterans utilizing community care providers in VISN 4 continued to grow as the MISSION Act provided enhanced community care benefits.

Our medical centers in VISN 4 improved scheduling and access to community care providers throughout the fiscal year. Our dedicated staff routinely exceeds the VA national average in scheduling turnaround times and consult management.

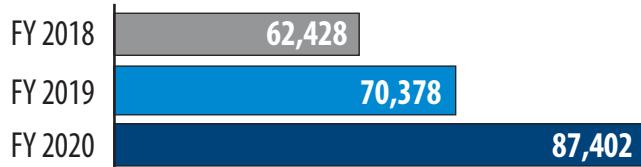
AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS TO SCHEDULE A COMMUNITY CARE APPOINTMENT



Scheduled and Completed Consults



Unique Veterans Served by Community Care Staff



Community Collaboration

While embracing change and striving for success, our staff adopted several new practices. We increased ongoing collaboration with Optum, our community care network third party administrator. Each medical center and VISN points of contact communicate regularly via scheduled monthly calls to ensure that providers and specialty care services are available within the appropriate geographic locations.

We also coordinated with large health care systems to develop specific points of contact within both VA and the community locations. This streamlines the scheduling

process for Veterans even further based on their individual preferences and needs. If necessary, we will coordinate three-way calls with community care staff, the Veteran and the community provider to eliminate any delays and confusion with appointment scheduling.

Through Community Care Oversight Councils, VISN 4 Community Care programs and leadership continue to improve processes that ensures our Veterans are receiving the care they need at the right time, right place and with the right provider.

New Location for Columbia County Clinic

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center relocated the Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic from Berwick to Bloomsburg, Pa. The new clinic opened in August 2020 and is operated by Valor Healthcare.

Primary care services available at the new clinic include diagnostic testing, lab, x-ray, immunizations, social work services, tele-mental health, tele-nutrition and women's health.



Columbia County VA Clinic
26 Columbia Mall Drive
Columbia County Mall
Bloomsburg, PA 17815



VA ONLINE RESOURCES

Our call centers sometimes experience unusually high call volumes. To provide you with the best customer service, feel free to utilize the following online self-service tools for common requests and questions.

- Update contact information* www.va.gov/change-address
- Schedule or view appointments online www.va.gov/health-care/schedule-view-va-appointments
- Get email updates on COVID-19 vaccines www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/stay-informed
- COVID-19 vaccines frequently asked questions www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine
- Enroll in VA Health Care www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction
- Volunteer for VA's COVID-19 research www.va.gov/coronavirus-research

*Important: Veterans are strongly encouraged to submit address changes through va.gov rather than My HealtheVet.



EXPANDING MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Expansion of Suicide Prevention Efforts

Key suicide prevention initiatives across VISN 4 included further expansion of efforts with community and state partners. VA's public health strategy combines partnerships with communities to implement tailored, local prevention plans while also focusing on evidence based clinical strategies for intervention. A goal of VA's suicide prevention effort is to equip communities to help Veterans get the right care, whenever and wherever they need it.

VISN 4 further expanded efforts with community and state partners to implement VA's National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide. Due to a historic commitment to suicide prevention among Veterans, VISN 4 was invited to be one of three VISN's to roll-out the community-based portion of this work. VISN 4 hired Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinators (CEPC's) based at each of

our nine medical centers to work with local community and state partners to establish suicide prevention coalitions. CEPC's will work hand in hand with staff and community members to address the needs of Veterans where they live.



VISN 4's Suicide Prevention Manager and Chief Mental Health Officer served as members of the Pennsylvania Governor's Challenge team for Suicide Prevention. VHA partnered with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to convene Governor's Challenges in various states across the US. Objectives include forming an interagency military and civilian team of state leaders and policy makers to develop and implement a strategic action plan to prevent and reduce suicide and to define and measure success, including defining assignments, deadlines, and measurable outcomes.

Access to Mental Health Care During COVID-19

Access to mental health care during the coronavirus pandemic was of paramount importance this year. We continued our care for Veterans to lessen potential risks associated with isolation and stress caused by the pandemic and provided outreach to Veterans with known vulnerabilities. With expanded use of VA Video Connect (VVC), our mental health providers across the VISN 4 network quickly developed new processes to make sure Veterans can meet virtually with their providers and support groups.

Our mental health providers completed 15,200 VVC visits in October 2020 compared to 1,400 VVC visits in February, a 985% increase. We also greatly expanded VVC to the Veterans Justice Outreach program, completing more than 1,600 VVC visits to ensure Veterans involved with the justice system remain connected to VA. Access to substance use disorder treatment was an area of priority as we moved from face to face to virtual care. VISN 4 had 9,000 Substance Abuse Disorder group encounters in FY 2020.

Our inpatient and residential treatment units worked to continue to admit and treat Veterans during the pandemic. In Pittsburgh, a separate COVID-19 Behavioral Health inpatient unit was established for Veterans and treatment continued as usual, including daily face-to-face rounds by treatment teams.

Management of Patients at Risk

There are multiple ways that VISN 4 identifies and assists Veterans at risk of untoward events. REACH VET is one way. It is a predictive analytics platform that identifies Veterans at the highest statistical risk of suicide who may benefit from enhanced care, outreach, and assessment of risk. This program helps connect providers with Veterans and enables providers to re-evaluate or enhance their care. Data suggests that REACH VET is effective in reducing suicide attempts among Veterans identified.

VISN 4 remained a national leader with REACH VET metrics during FY20, and three of the top medical centers nationally—Butler, Lebanon and Wilkes-Barre—are within VISN 4.

Expansion of Primary Care-Mental Health Integration

Primary Care-Mental Health Integration (PCMHI) allows Veterans to obtain mental health treatment services while remaining in the primary care setting. This model of care enables an efficient and more acceptable approach to providing more Veterans with mental health services.

Having PCMHI clinicians co-located with primary care clinics also results in a simplified process to make referrals. VISN 4 established a partnership to provide “warm hand-offs” of Veterans from primary care providers in Wilmington’s five outpatient clinics to mental health providers located in Philadelphia. This work was innovative and demonstrated that this model of care can be delivered using a fully virtual process. More than 950 Veterans were referred in FY20 including approximately 25% referred to specialty mental health. As a result, the Virtual Integrated PCMHI (VIP) Hub was named one of the ten winners in the annual VHA Shark Tank competition!

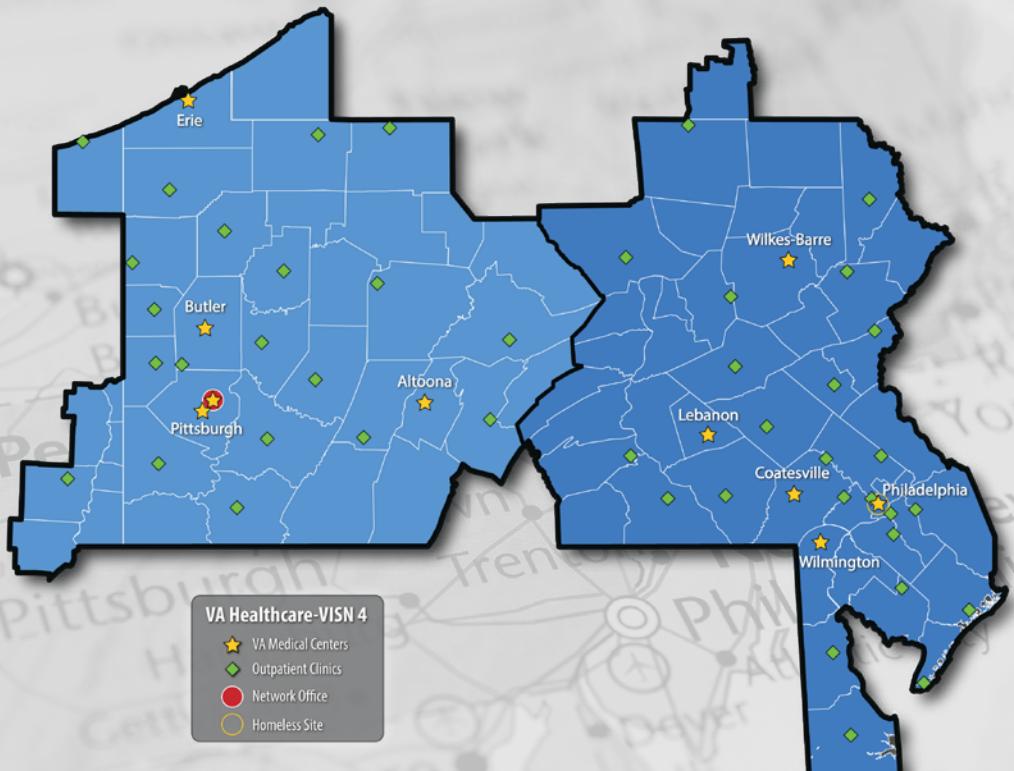


**Having thoughts of suicide?
Make the call.**

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

VA Healthcare–VISN 4 is a fully integrated network of 9 VA campuses, 45 outpatient clinics, 17 Vet Centers, and 1 mobile clinic.

In fiscal year 2020, VISN 4 served 300,307 Veterans from across the nation, primarily from Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Ohio, West Virginia and New York.



AROUND VISN 4



Altoona, PA

James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center
2907 Pleasant Valley Blvd.
Altoona, PA 16602

877-626-2500

www.altoona.va.gov

www.facebook.com/VAAaltoona
twitter.com/VAAaltoona

■ Total Veterans Served	24,970
■ Female Veterans Served	2,190
■ Operating Budget	\$159,999,000
■ Admissions	151
■ Outpatient Visits	181,342
■ Employees	946



Butler, PA

Butler VA Health Care System
353 North Duffy Road

Butler, PA 16001

800-362-8262

www.butler.va.gov

www.facebook.com/VAButlerPA
twitter.com/VAButlerPA

■ Total Veterans Served	22,167
■ Female Veterans Served	1,318
■ Operating Budget	\$140,390,748
■ Admissions	272
■ Outpatient Visits	192,299
■ Employees	776



Coatesville, PA

Coatesville VA Medical Center
1400 Blackhorse Hill Road

Coatesville, PA 19320

800-290-6172

www.coatesville.va.gov

www.facebook.com/CoatesvilleVAMC
twitter.com/coatesvillevamc

■ Total Veterans Served	17,200
■ Female Veterans Served	988
■ Operating Budget	\$191,976,000
■ Admissions	1,287
■ Outpatient Visits	193,171
■ Employees	1,226



Erie, PA

Erie VA Medical Center
135 East 38th Street Blvd.
Erie, PA 16504

800-274-8387

www.erie.va.gov

www.facebook.com/VAMCErie
 twitter.com/ErieVAMC

	Total Veterans Served	21,215
	Female Veterans Served	1,735
	Operating Budget	\$135,400,000
	Admissions	281
	Outpatient Visits	247,545
	Employees	838



Lebanon, PA

Lebanon VA Medical Center
1700 South Lincoln Avenue
Lebanon, PA 17042

800-409-8771

www.lebanon.va.gov

www.facebook.com/VALebanon
 twitter.com/VALebanon

	Total Veterans Served	38,649
	Female Veterans Served	4,086
	Operating Budget	\$446,421,579
	Admissions	3,190
	Outpatient Visits	471,257
	Employees	1,751



Philadelphia, PA

Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC
3900 Woodland Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19104

800-949-1001

www.philadelphia.va.gov

www.facebook.com/PhiladelphiaVAMC
 twitter.com/VAPhiladelphia

	Total Veterans Served	62,156
	Female Veterans Served	4,847
	Operating Budget	\$591,757,000
	Admissions	5,312
	Outpatient Visits	496,406
	Employees	2,840



Pittsburgh, PA

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System
University Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15240

866-482-7488

www.pittsburgh.va.gov
 www.facebook.com/VAPHS
 twitter.com/VAPittsburgh

	Total Veterans Served	72,647
	Female Veterans Served	7,301
	Operating Budget	\$719,354,000
	Admissions	11,830
	Outpatient Visits	675,675
	Employees	3,926



Wilkes-Barre, PA

Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center
1111 East End Blvd.
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711

877-928-2621

www.wilkes-barre.va.gov
 www.facebook.com/VAWilkesBarre

	Total Veterans Served	36,200
	Female Veterans Served	3,031
	Operating Budget	\$349,329,000
	Admissions	2,561
	Outpatient Visits	370,037
	Employees	1,422



Wilmington, DE

Wilmington VA Medical Center
1601 Kirkwood Highway
Wilmington, DE 19805

800-461-8262

www.wilmington.va.gov
 www.facebook.com/WilmingtonVAMC
 twitter.com/WilmingtonVAMC

	Total Veterans Served	32,612
	Female Veterans Served	2,894
	Operating Budget	\$242,167,000
	Admissions	1,304
	Outpatient Visits	347,414
	Employees	1,198

We'd Like to Hear from You

This annual report is published for the employees, volunteers, patients and friends of VA Healthcare-VISN 4. For more information about this publication, contact David Cowgill at 412-822-3318.

**VA Healthcare-VISN 4
1010 Delafield Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15215
412-822-3316**

www.visn4.va.gov

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Healthcare-VISN 4