

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

**Veterans Health Administration
VA Heartland Network (VISN 15)**

Message From the Network Director

Greetings Veterans, volunteers, community partners, employees, and friends of VISN 15, the VA Heartland Network:

I am pleased to present you with the 2023 VISN 15 Annual Report.

Last year, VISN 15 VA Medical Centers began an unappreciated campaign to facilitate the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act. This law, passed in August 2022, is the most significant expansion in VA health care history and expands access to VA health care to Veterans with toxic exposures. I'm proud that 193,706 Veterans in our network received toxic exposure screenings by the end of 2023. And 96.2% of our clinicians and employees have been trained on six PACT Act training modules to be a leading authority on the PACT Act to further serve the Veterans in the VA Heartland Network.

In FY23, each VA Medical Center in VISN 15 held a local Mental Health Summit to invite stakeholders from the community to foster ongoing partnerships. We rounded out the fiscal year when VISN 15 hosted a virtual community-wide meeting with all VISN 15 medical centers and their community partners. As a component of the Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment, COMPACT Act allows Veterans in suicidal crisis to go to any VA or community health care facility for free emergency mental health care, expanding access to emergent services and furthering our commitment to suicide prevention and mental health initiatives.

We began a new hiring and onboarding initiative to hire new staff faster and more competitively. Our VISN 15 HR staff hired 2,389 new staff to increase our workforce, with a growth rate of 8.2% from the previous fiscal year. Additionally, VISN 15 HR staff reduced our loss rate by over 3% from a year ago. VISN 15 has been a top VHA performer in two key recruitment metrics: time to hire and time to fill for three-plus years.

Our Veterans continue to trust us to provide them with exceptional and well-coordinated care. Our Veterans say they trust VISN 15 facilities for their health care needs. In fiscal year 2023, our trust score was 91.5%, above the national average of 90.7%. Our top five compliments are quality of care, interactions with staff, cleanliness of our facilities, satisfaction with specialty care, and appointment check-in process. Two VISN 15 Medical Centers earned the prestigious 5-star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for overall hospital quality, and we continue our journey to become a high-reliability organization.

It is our honor and privilege to serve you.

Sincerely,

Patricia Hall
Network Director, VISN 15



Executive Leadership Team



**Patricia L. Hall,
PhD, FACHE**
Network Director



**Angela
Athmann**
*Deputy Network
Director*



**Dr. Ahmad
Batrash, MD**
*Chief Medical
Officer*



**Dr. Toby
Underwood**
*Chief Nursing
Officer*



Tera Sheppard
*Chief Human
Resource Officer*



**Dr. Melody
Queenan**
*Quality
Management
Officer*

Where We Serve

Providing High-Quality Health Care to **Veterans** across 263 counties in **Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, Indiana, and Arkansas.**

Who We Serve

262,301 VETERANS



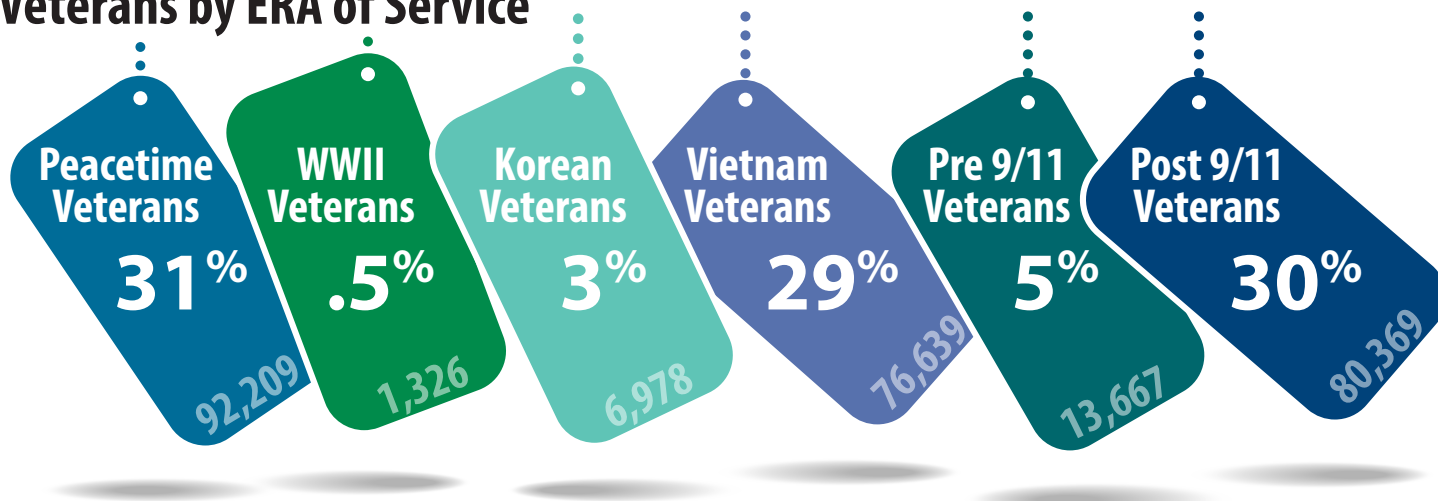
87%
men



13%
women

	<25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+	Unknown
BY AGE	1,913	17,201	30,939	30,466	42,842	61,497	58,428	18,982	33
	.7%	6.6%	11.8%	11.6%	16.3%	23.4%	22.3%	7.2%	.01%

Veterans by ERA of Service



What Veterans are Saying

Top Five Areas Veterans Complimented:

- Quality of Care
- Interactions with staff
- Cleanliness of facilities
- Satisfaction with Specialty Care
- Appointment Check In Process



91.5% of patients report trusting VA Medical Centers across VISN 15 for their health needs!

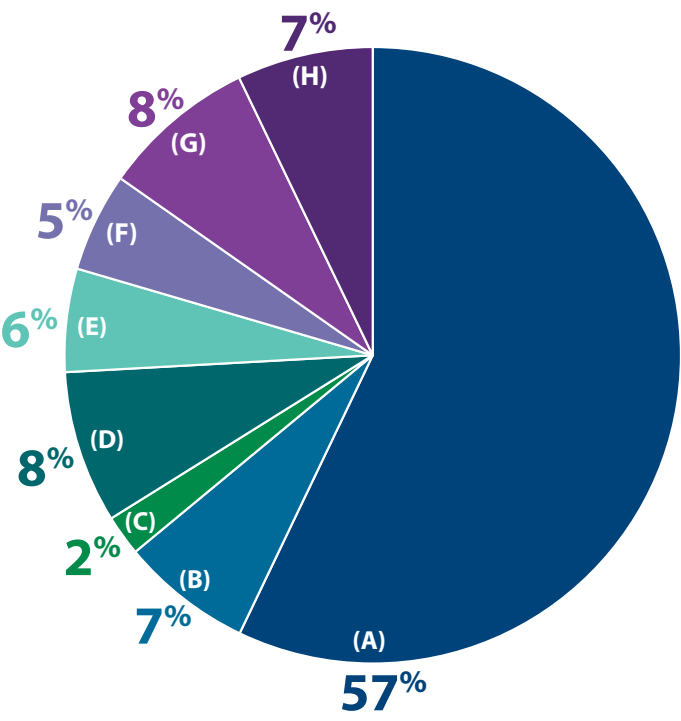
Based on 68,275 comments received in VSignals in fiscal year 2023, our trust score is 91.5%, which is above national average of 90.7%.

OPERATING STATISTICS



OPERATING BUDGET

A.)	Salary and Benefits.....	\$1,906,912,000
B.)	Medical Care Collection Fund.....	\$230,060,000
C.)	Equipment.....	\$71,196,000
D.)	Land and Structures	\$267,107,000
E.)	Prosthetics & Sensory Aids ..	\$180,796,000
F.)	Drugs and Medicines.....	\$173,591,000
G.)	Consolidated Mail-out Pharmacy	\$271,260,000
H.)	All Other.....	\$238,420,000
Total		\$3,339,342,000

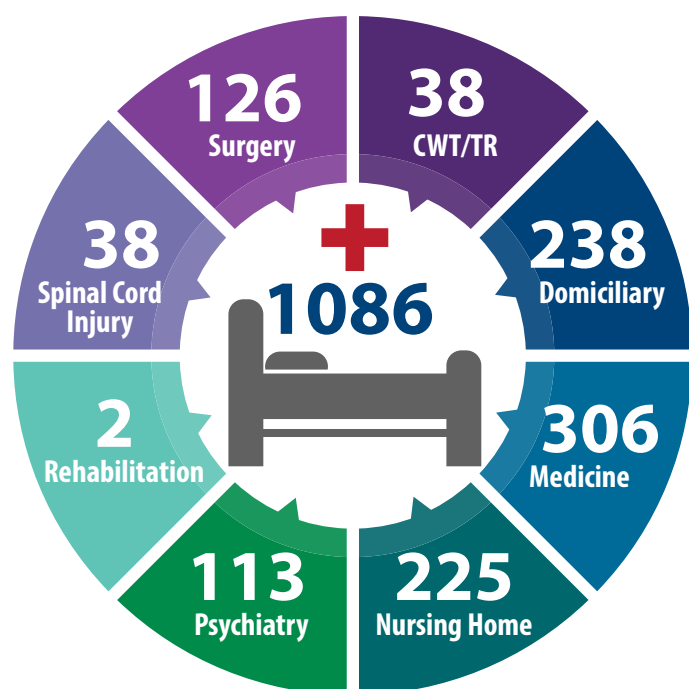


RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Total Funding for Research	\$13,844,257
Investigators	153
Projects.....	308
Total Funding for Trainees	\$51,923,673
Major Medical Academic Affiliates	20
Minority Serving Institutional Affiliates.....	21
Training Programs	40
Paid Trainee Positions.....	562
Total Trainees (paid and unpaid).....	5,000

OPERATING BEDS

Total Number of Beds	1,086
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WORKFORCE

Total Number of Employees	15,726
Veteran Employees.....	3,565
New Hires	2,389
Onboard Employee Growth	+1,122 / 8.2%
VISN Total Loss Rate.....	8.3%

22.67%
VETERAN WORKFORCE
across VISN 15 in 2023.

WORKLOAD

Total Enrollees.....	329,132
Unique Patients	262,301
Outpatient Visits	3,214,642
Total Admissions	29,844
Emergency Department Visits.....	72,542
Veterans Utilizing Community Care.....	260,599
Prescriptions Filled	12,632,492
Procedures Performed.....	262,301

VOLUNTEERS AND DONATIONS

Total Volunteer Hours.....	131,784
Volunteers	1713
Avg. Hours	77
Total Value of Volunteer Service	\$3,761,104
Total Donations Received.....	\$2,264,902



During National Volunteer Week, which was celebrated from April 16-22, 2023, John J. Pershing VA Medical Center took time to thank their volunteers. One honoree was Charlie Mosebach, a retired ICU Nurse and an Army Veteran. A huge thank you to Charlie and all our volunteers for all that they do!

HIRE FASTER AND MORE COMPETITIVELY



Department of Veterans Affairs Prioritizes Hiring Staff to Provide Quality Care for Veterans

To accommodate for increased demand related to the PACT Act, last year Veterans Health Administration (VHA) embarked on journey to hire 52,000 employees to meet the increased demand for care and to

maintain an efficient workforce. “Most of these occupations directly affect patient care and services,” said the Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal. Including physicians, nurses, licensed practical nurses, nursing assistants, medical support, food services workers and housekeepers. To achieve this goal, everyone must work together as a team

“I’m really proud of all of our network leaders and medical center directors for executing on this, and we’re working as hard as we can not only to bring more folks on board, but to improve the hiring process itself,” Dr. Elnahal said during the roundtable.

to improve the hiring and onboard experience. “I’m really proud of all of our network leaders and medical center directors for executing on this, and we’re working as hard as we can not only to bring more folks on board, but to improve the hiring process itself,” Elnahal said during the roundtable last August.

The Onboarding Surge Event (OSE) model is a standardized, team-centric approach that aims to fast-track the onboarding experience of a selectee by coordinating all pre-employment actions into a single day event.

In 2023 each VA Medical Centers in VISN15 conducted at least one OSE at their respective facility to foster a collaborative relationship between Human Resources, hiring managers, and employees, and to reduce the number of selectees waiting to finish pre-employment onboarding requirements.

Many VA Medical Center’s also organized hiring fairs in conjunction with OSE events. This strategy has been highly effective in enabling the public to view the latest job openings, apply for them, and potentially participate in interviews during the event. As a result, the VISN hiring process has been further optimized.

Numerous disciplines and departments collaborated and worked together to ensure the success of those OSE. VA Medical Center's came up with best practices that were shared across the network. Job applicants also provided valuable feedback which will be incorporated into future events.

As a results of our collective efforts, VISN 15 has been a top performer across VHA in two recruitment metrics, 'Time to Hire' and 'Time to Fill', for three years running. In 2023, a total of 10,763 job offers were issued, categorized in chart the below.

	FY23 Hires
New to federal service	2,410*
VISN External Hires	2,249
External Transfers	129*
VISN Internal Hires	3,179
Internal VA & VHA	547*
Internal Same Location	2,249*
Total	10,763

* data provided by WMC, from the Salesforce Recruitment Tracker

VISN 15 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Established an Innovative Environment by creating the "Bullpen" and then sparking the next generation of HR innovators by sharing this latest VISN 15 HR innovation.
- Connected VISN and VA Medical Center supervisors with tools and strategies for recruitment.
- Teams delivered approximately 30 HR-related hiring manager trainings sessions, covering all aspects of workforce recruitment including use of incentives to attract and retain employees. 20 of these 30 sessions coincided with the biggest surge associated with VHA's Priority to Action.
- Developed and delivered 149 total VISN HR Professionals and/or VISN Managers trainings in 2023. An average exceeding 12 sessions per months were delivered to HR staff and an average exceeding 2 were delivered to VISN supervisors.



- 93% of new hires completed 201 Jump Start and New Talent Development Program within 18 months of their entry on duty.
- 750 managers and supervisors attended VISN wide pilot of a supervisor training program that aims to provide consistent information across the VISN.
- In accordance with the PACT Act, VISN 15 implemented critical skill incentives (CSI) for 12 of VA mission critical/shortage occupations, reviewing and processing over 1,300 critical skill incentives total.

Critical Skills Incentives (CSI)

- In accordance with the PACT Act, VISN 15 implemented CSIs for 12 of the VA's mission critical/shortage occupations, reviewing and processing over 1,300 Critical Skill Incentives

Suitability & Personal Identity Verification (PIV)

- 3,284 - Background Cases completed
- 4,195 - Backgrounds Reviewed during onboarding, transfer, etc)
- 11,624 - Badges issued

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help you find the right care.*



**TELE
EMERGENCY
CARE**



2nd in the nation in **PHYSICIAN CAPACITY** and **PRODUCTIVITY** in 2023.

VA HEALTH CONNECT

VA Health Connect is VA's new 24/7 virtual service that makes it easier for Veterans to access "The Right Care, Right Now." The concierge services provided to our Veterans through VA Health Connect, also known as Clinical Contact Center (CCC), includes pharmacy, scheduling or canceling appointments, nurse evaluations, and virtual provider visits to the Veteran in the comfort of their own home.

This is an opportunity for our Veterans to benefit from concierge-level medicine through the VA. In fiscal year 2023, we received over 2.1 million phone calls from Veterans and provided virtual care to 10,500 of them. We lead the nation in Veterans treated 5 out of the 12 months and ended the year with the 2nd most Veterans cared for in the Nation.

Call us if you are experiencing new medical concerns at any time of day or night. Do you need a prescription refilled? Did something come up, and you need to schedule/reschedule an appointment? Please call us; we will help you get the care you need. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, call 1-833-381-1943.

CLINICAL RESOURCE HUB

The mission of our Clinical Resource Hub (CRH) is to enhance the Veteran experience and wellness through access to high-quality clinical care through innovative technologies and a focus on serving Veterans in rural locations.

This year has seen unprecedented growth in our services to our Veterans. Our Veterans' needs have guided our focus. We bolstered our primary care and mental health services; we have seen over 17,000 Veterans in these clinics in 2023. Another pillar of services has been specialty care, Cardiology, Neurology, Dermatology, and Bariatrics. Our bariatrics program was honored as the top provider in the VA. Our specialty services combined have seen over 4,400 Veterans in fiscal year 2023.

In this time of clinical excellence, it is exciting to provide Veterans with the care that they need in the manner that they wish to receive it, whether in person at their Community Based Outpatient Clinic or via VA Video Connect from the comfort of their home.

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Your **Schedule**

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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

mobile.va.gov/appstore

COMMUNITY CARE

The VA offers medical care to Veterans through community providers when it is unable to provide the care required by the Veterans. The eligibility for community care is based on specific requirements, availability of VA care, and the individual circumstances of each Veterans. In 2023, we authorized community care appointments for 144,880 Veterans.

3rd in the nation, routinely, in
CONSULT TIMELINESS in 2023.

81% Community Care **VETERAN**
SATISFACTION SCORE in 2023.

Community Care Accomplishments:

- Consistently schedules timely Community Care, average wait time of 18.4 days. Routinely in the top 3 for timeliness in the nation.
- Community Care Veteran Satisfaction score of 81.8% making us one of only nine VISN's across the nation at 80% or above.



TELEHEALTH

Our network has a rich history of providing care through telehealth to Veterans across various locations. When service providers are not available in local areas, VISN 15 ensures that they can still provide care to Veterans in our network. This ensures that Veterans receive the necessary care and services when they need it. In the fiscal year of 2023, 79,361 unique Veterans in our network used various telehealth modalities.

34% of Veterans in our network
UTILIZED various **TELEHEALTH**
modalities in 2023.

Telehealth Accomplishments:

- New Utilizing: InterFacility TeleNeurology Service for inpatient and outpatient care via video platform between medical center's in our network.
- Approved for InterFacility TeleCardiology Service for outpatient care via video platform between medical center's in our network.
- Kansas City completed the National Virtual Health Resource Center Cohort.
- Pilot VISN for VET-HOME, VA's new national hub serving Veterans with military environmental exposures and perform telehealth registry evaluations for Veterans.

REMOTE PATIENT MONITORING - HOME TELEHEALTH

Our Remote Patient Monitoring-Home Telehealth (RPM-HT) provides support to Veterans in managing their chronic diseases by utilizing in-home monitoring systems and video technology. In the fiscal year of 2023, our RPM-HT team assisted 5,740 unique Veterans and conducted more than 1,232 educational video visits to help them manage various chronic conditions.

2.46% of Veterans in our network
UTILIZED RPM-HT in 2023.

SERVE VETERANS WITH MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURE



New Law Expands VA Care and Benefits for Toxic-Exposed Veterans

President Biden signed the PACT Act into law on August 10, 2022, which aims to address military environmental exposures and provide care for Veterans who suffer from toxic exposure-related conditions. The PACT Act expands VA health care eligibility for Veterans with toxic exposures, and requires VA to provide toxic exposure screenings at its health care facilities across the country. Every Veteran enrolled in VA health care will receive an initial screening and a follow-up screening at least once every 5 years.

PACT Act Key Components:

- **Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures** and Veterans of the Vietnam era, Gulf War era, and Post-9/11 era.
- **Improves the decision-making process** for determining what medical conditions will be considered for presumptive status, making it easier for Veterans to get their benefits.
- Ensures every enrolled Veteran **will receive an initial toxic exposure screening** and a follow-up screening every five years. Veterans who are not enrolled, but who are eligible to enroll, will have an opportunity to enroll and receive the screening.
- **Requires VA research** on the mortality of Veterans who served in Southwest Asia during the Gulf War; Post-9/11 Veteran health trends; and cancer rates.
- Provides robust authority to VA to **expand the workforce and meet the growing demand** for benefits and services.
- **Authorizes construction of 31 new facilities** across the country, providing greater access to VA health care.

From December 10 to 17, 2023, the “PACT Act Week of Action” was held, and VISN15 had an outstanding beginning. Across the country 90 facilities, including all seven Medical Centers in VISN 15, organized town hall meetings to discuss the importance of the historic law for Veterans and their families.



VISN 15 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Medical centers in the VISN15 catchment area have actively organized, successfully hosted, and/or participated in over 100 events, extending outreach efforts related to the PACT Act.
- Many of these events provided a convenient one-stop-shop to enroll in VA Health Care, complete toxic exposure screenings and meet with representatives from Veterans Benefits Administration to learn more about their benefits.
- Medical centers also utilized data from the business management office to coordinate and send postcards to Veterans. The post card featured a QR code mapped back to VA’s online enrollment page and provided VA healthcare information.



12,828 NEW to VA VETERAN enrollees in 2023.

Toxic Exposure Screening (TES):

- 193,706 unique Veterans screened
- 88,336 unique Veterans reported at least one exposure and further requiring TES Follow-Up
- Only 2% Unresolved TES Follow-Up of total screenings are unresolved <30 days
- Only 1% Unresolved TES Follow-Up of total screenings are unresolved >30 days



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IRAQ, OR
ANY OTHER
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VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

ACCELERATE VA'S JOURNEY TO A HIGH RELIABILITY ORGANIZATION



VHA'S JOURNEY TO HIGH RELIABILITY

Your Care is Our Mission.

VHA is on a journey to become a High Reliability Organization (HRO). An HRO is an organization that experiences fewer than anticipated accidents or events of harm despite operating in highly complex, high-risk environments.

HROs establish trust among leaders and staff by creating a Just Culture that balances individual accountability with systems thinking. HRO leaders empower all staff to lead continuous process improvements within their workspace. Creating an environment where employees feel safe to report harm or near misses requires our leaders to focus on the why, not the who, when errors occur. Our journey is focused on continuously learning and improving the safety of our processes to help us achieve our goal of ensuring that every patient receives excellent care every time.

High Reliability is not new to VHA, but by formalizing our journey, we ensure that all VHA facilities across the nation are practicing High Reliability Principles using a standard approach, so Veterans receive an unmatched experience regardless of where they choose to receive VHA care.

In VISN 15, we have made significant progress toward enhancing the safety and quality of care. Our achievements, innovations, and best practices on this journey include:

- Active integration of Project Management and Change Management with VA Priority to Action (P2A) efforts. All VA Medical Centers used change management tools - completed a PCT, 4Ps, and Risk assessment for at least 1 foundational practice.
- First VISN to establish a FTE Change Management Coordinator to build and support staff with change management training and tools. (111 trained Practitioners, 370 participants in a V15 exclusive Change Management for Managers/Leaders accredited course, and 433 Apprentice Level Passport for Change).
- Hosted the first VISN HRO Lead and Champion Face-to-Face meeting in Kansas City, January 2023.
- VISN 15 HRO Swimlanes adopted by VHA as one of three assessments to assist VISNs and facilities in the completion of the VHA HRO Maturity Matrix. All facilities, including VISN headquarters, have completed a HRO Summit.
- Continued to conduct the only VHA in-person Team Training Train-the-Trainer 2-day event to build and support the greatest number of active Team Trainer faculty cadres across VHA.
- Recruited and hired 15 full-time employee (FTE) Change Management Coordinators for IT integration.

- Launched a “Catch of the Day” podcast to inspire HRO engagement by individuals and teams.
- Conducted a HRO Lead/Champion face-to-face meeting in April 2024 that included an experiential HRO exercise at the St. Louis Airport.
- Chartered and executed (HRO Committee as Process Owner) a HRO and Simulation Lead Project focused on Pre-Construction Design Simulation and hosted first of its kind VISN Construction Simulation Workshop in St. Louis, August 2023.
- VISN 15 expanded modes of inquiry and engagement with staff to become more agile and continuously improve through HRO specific pulses delivered thru crowdsourcing technology (Perceptyx), HRO Summits, Swimlane Teams, and active Leader Rounding.
- We are proud to acknowledge that 4 of 7 VA Medical Centers in VISN 15 had 24 NCPS Team Training Master Instructors reach an award and recognition status in FY23. NCPS Team Training is a foundational strategy to advance high reliability in VHA. The goal of Team Training is to create high functioning clinical teams. The behaviors and tools comprising Team Training help avoid patient harm by recognizing and managing risks and threats in the clinical setting. Team Training safety behaviors also assist teams in detecting and handling small errors in daily work so they don’t result in larger or catastrophic failures. NCPS Master Instructors are VHA employees who serve as champions and change agents for HRO and Crew Resource Management. Becoming a Master Instructor is a commitment to help the VAMC transform the organization’s culture.
- Our VISN’s HRO Lead site, Kansas City VA, participated in a pilot for the VHA HRO Maturity Model. The VISN office was also host to a 2-day meeting for the VHA HRO Assessment workgroup.

ALL EMPLOYEE SURVEY

It takes an engaged workforce to live up to Lincoln’s vision of caring for our nation’s Veterans. The VA All Employee survey (AES) helps improve engagement across VA! Click this [link](#) to learn more about VA’s data source for employee engagement.

AES Highlights:



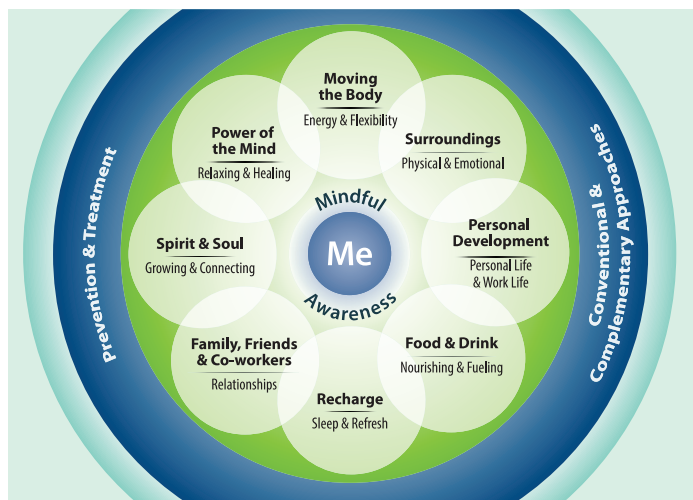
- Across VISN 15 employee engagement metrics improved. Two VA Medical Centers showing improvement in participation ranging from 4-18%.
- 3% improvement on employee engagement and burnout scores across VISN 15.
- Each VA Medical Center implemented ReBoot recommendations. Reporting staff satisfaction with decreased meeting times and better access to whole health training and activities.
- Kansas City VAMC initiated the Friday Dance Party as a whole health measure that has expanded participation across the enterprise.
- VISN 15 network office employees developed and presented their AES action plans with bi-annual reports of progress and accomplishments.
- Wichita VAMC and VISN 15 AES Coordinator/ Champions were interviewed by the National Center for Organization Development (NCOD) for best practices related to participation and Office of Health Information (OHI) improvements.

3% IMPROVEMENT on EMPLOYEE engagement and burnout score.

VISN 15 Education Highlights:

- VISN 15 is recognized as a leader in several training programs. Facilities and VISN routinely reach out for shared resources and access to training related to mentor/coach training, nurse manager training, and administrative officer training. VISN 15 is currently providing mentor/coach training to the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity, and Inclusion. We have also trained instructors for VISN 12 and assisted Tomah VAMC in getting their program started.
- VISN 15 provides the primary support for the MidCon Nurse Manager Leadership Development training and the MidCon Nurse Manager monthly Lunch and Learn series preparing VISN 10, 12, 15, and 23 nurse managers to lead our workforce.

SUPPORT VETERANS' WHOLE HEALTH, THEIR CAREGIVERS AND SURVIVORS



Whole Health is VA's approach to care that supports your health and well-being. Whole Health centers around what matters to you, not what is the matter with you. Whole Health is a holistic approach that combines traditional medical care with self-care, skill-building, and prevention. In the Heartland Network, all our facilities have a robust Whole Health program where Veterans can participate in a personalized health plan based on their values, needs, and goals. We are seeing promising results for Veterans and staff.

Whole Health puts Veterans at the center of their care, helping them make more informed decisions, adopt healthy behaviors, have positive patient encounters, and achieve better health outcomes. Every week the adventure is different. Opportunities range from kayaking, hiking, archery, disc golf, all with the assistance of Whole Health. Learn more [here](#).

WHOLE HEALTH ACROSS VISN15



VA Marion Health Care:

Unveiling the Remarkable Impact of Recreation Therapy Month: A Year of Empowering Veterans through Our Program

Veterans participated in national competitions like the Creative Arts Fest and the Summer Sports Clinic, where activities included surfing, CrossFit, cycling, kayaking, and sailing. Veterans, caregivers, and employees can now use our Outdoor Gym yard to work on their fitness and be in the community together.

"We can help many veterans depending on their goals. Whether it's physical, psychological, spiritual, or emotional support, we focus on what is important to the veteran. We determine their goals and priorities in life, and that is where we begin," shares Recreation Therapist Ethan Blumhorst.



The Power of Archery as a Form of Group Therapy for Veterans

Archery has long been recognized as a powerful form of group therapy for veterans, offering a unique blend of physical activity, focus, and camaraderie. The use of archery as a therapeutic activity has gained traction in recent years, with numerous studies highlighting its benefits for mental health.

One of the key advantages of archery as a therapeutic tool is its ability to promote mindfulness and concentration. The act of drawing back the bowstring and aiming at a target requires immense focus, helping veterans redirect their attention away from intrusive thoughts or anxieties. This meditative quality can provide a sense of calm and control,

allowing participants to experience a respite from the challenges they may be facing.

The benefits of archery as group therapy extend beyond the shooting range. Veterans who engage in regular archery sessions often report reduced stress levels, improved mood, enhanced self-esteem, and increased resilience in dealing with daily challenges. It offers a holistic approach to mental health support by incorporating physical exercise, mindfulness practices, social interaction into one cohesive activity. This type of therapy can help veterans to reconnect with nature and find peace in the outdoors.

VA St. Louis Health Care System:

A Life Changing Story

U.S. Air Force Veteran, Gilberto Pinela, was frustrated, depressed, and had no energy. When COVID hit, he stopped exercising, gained an unhealthy amount of weight, and started having pain from an old ankle injury. He didn't want to start his sixties in such an unhealthy state. He worked with his health and wellness coach, Raymond, to create a personalized health plan.



Gilberto began receiving Battlefield Acupuncture for his ankle pain and joined Dr. Khanna's Metabolic Health program to improve his whole health. With the support of his whole health team, Veteran Pinela changed his eating habits and successfully lost 55 pounds in 3 months! He is now exercising again and continues to maintain a healthy weight. ***"I strongly recommend seeking guidance from Dr. Khanna, her nurse Monica, and the Whole Health team if you are depressed, desperate, or hopeless about losing weight – believe me, the results are long-term, and your life will change for the better in no time!" Gilberto Pinela, MA, U.S. Air Force Veteran***

48% of Veterans engaged in metabolic health program worked with a health and wellness coach and 64% showed improved health screening values and/or at least 3% weight loss.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT

VA's Caregiver Support Program (CSP) offers clinical services to caregivers of eligible and covered Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system. The program's mission is to promote the health and well-being of family caregivers who care for our Nation's Veterans, through education, resources, support, and services. There is a CSP team located at every VA facility.

99% on processing **APPLICATIONS** within 90 days in **2023**.

VISN 15 CSP Highlights:

- 99% on processing applications within 90 days, earning all medical centers an outstanding rating.
- 2,027 consults completed by centralized eligibility and appeals team, average wait of time of 8 days.
- Each VA Medical Center launched the joint Caregiver Support Program/ Clinical Resource Hub project. This enables caregivers to receive individual therapy through the Clinical Resource Hub. This enables facility providers more time to see Veteran patients and ensures that the costs for the service are covered by the CSP Program Office.
- VISN 15 hired and on boarded one of the first "Respite Champions" who was responsible for training respite subject matter experts at each medical center in VISN 15 with a focus on increasing respite utilization by our caregivers.



PREVENT VETERAN SUICIDE



Innovative Team from VISN 15 named a Promising Practice in the 2023

VHA Diffusion of Excellence Shark Tank Competition invites VA employees to pitch their innovative ideas to improve healthcare delivery to Veterans. The competition, inspired by the popular TV show “Shark Tank,” offers an opportunity for VA staff to showcase their creativity and problem-solving skills.

Last fall, a team of innovators from VISN 15 was named a Promising Practice for their Suicide Risk Follow-Up Monitor solution at the annual competition. The team developed an innovative solution that greatly improved the adherence rate for Comprehensive Suicide Risk Evaluation (CSRE) completion across the network. We are proud to recognize the hard work of the Net Project Team: Dr. Stephanie Davis, Karen

Baptiste, Cheryl Meisinger, Lesia Donley, Evan Nelson, Deb Ernzen, Karen Maikowski, and Dr. Selvam.



The presenter for the project and team member, Mike Rogers (left), from the VISN 15 Health Informatics Program, traveled to Washington, D.C., to present his pitch live as a Shark Tank

Finalist. VA Sierra Nevada Health Care emerged as the winning bidder. They appointed representatives from their facility to join the Promising Practice

Innovators group as a part of their Implementation Team. In January 2024, the teams attended VHA

Diffusion’s Base Camp, where they formulated an implementation plan to begin their journey of Facilitated Replication, a 6-8 month process of replicating the practice at a new VA facility. VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System successfully went live on February 5, 2024.

“The Suicide Risk Screen Follow-Up Monitor solution was developed

“A huge thank you goes our amazing Suicide Prevention Teams and clinical staff who embraced these new tools that led it to success!”

- Mike Rogers

to identify, in real-time, patients who have a positive suicide screen and require the completion of the CSRE follow-up note,” explained Rogers. To ensure the safety of patients, this solution helped Suicide Prevention Teams provide support for healthcare providers to meet CSRE follow-up requirements. The success of the Suicide Risk Screen Follow-Up Monitor solution is a testament to the team’s innovative spirit behind it. Rogers expressed excitement that the solution has significantly improved our network adherence rate for CSRE completion, ensuring patients receive needed care.

continued on next page

The team implemented the solution in the Eastern Kansas Health Care System (EKHCS) and noted a 54% increase in CSRE completion rate in just one year, achieving a 100% completion rate in May 2022. The team maintained this 100% adherence rate for 16 consecutive months. Before the full implementation of this solution across the network, the adherence rate for CSRE completion was 65%, and our network ranked in the middle of other networks across the nation. Following the full implementation, the adherence rate significantly improved, and our

network became the first to cross the 90% eCSRE1 Adherence Rate, where we continue to lead the nation in this metric. Rogers was quick to share, “a huge thank you goes our amazing Suicide Prevention Teams and clinical staff who embraced these new tools that led it to success!”

To date, the team’s solution has been successfully adopted by 18 medical centers across the nation, and one medical center that is currently progressing toward full adoption. You can learn more about the team’s innovative solution by clicking this [link](#).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP COORDINATORS

Community engagement and partnership coordinators (CEPC) serves as subject matter experts of public health approaches, coalition development and facilitation, and other community-based models for Veteran suicide prevention.

VISN 15 CEPC Highlights:

- Partnered with over 50 community coalitions spanning 61 counties in their efforts to end Veteran suicide in 2023. This was achieved by expanding implementation of the public health model to prevent Veteran suicide.



MENTAL HEALTH SUMMITS

In 2023 each VA Medical Center in VISN 15 held a local Mental Health Summit to invite stakeholders from the community to foster ongoing partnerships.

Additionally, the Office of Integrated Veterans Care and Office of Mental Health & Suicide Prevention co-hosted a national Virtual Mental Health Summit. The focus was on relationship building and processes at the VISN level including between VISN Clinical Contact Center Directors and VISN Chief Mental Health Officers. One of the outcomes of the event

COMPACT ACT

The COMPACT Act, implemented by VA in January 2023, aims to avert Veteran suicide by increasing Veteran access to emergent suicide care for an acute suicidal crisis at a non VA facility. (Veteran Eligibility & Medical Criteria Apply).

Each VA Medical Center engaged their network of community providers to spread awareness and provide education through various COMPACT Act events including; Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Summits, Town Halls, Round Table Discussions, Mailer Campaigns, and a VISN wide Virtual Awareness Event.

Click this [link](#) to learn more about the COMPACT Act.



POSTVENTION ACTIVITIES

Each VA Medical Center established postvention teams to educate and support survivors of suicide loss. Best practices were shared across the network. Each VA Medical Center also participated in events to support survivors, such as Out of the Darkness Walks and International Survivors of Suicide Loss.

WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



Women served in the United States Military as early as the Revolutionary War. Since then, women of all ages, ranks, and levels of authority have entered every branch of service, made significant contributions, and suffered the same sacrifices as men. Today, only 44% of women Veterans are enrolled in VA health care. A majority of women Veterans are not utilizing their earned benefits. As a result, they do not have access to the VA health care system or the low- or cost-free care it offers. Click the [link](#) learn more about the VA Health Care for Women Veterans.

At each VA Medical Center nationwide, a Women Veterans Program Manager (WVPM) is designated to

advise and advocate for women Veterans. The WVPM can help coordinate all the services needed, from primary care to specialized care for chronic conditions or reproductive health. Woman Veterans who are interested in receiving care at VA should contact the nearest VA Medical Center and ask for the Women Veterans Program Manager.

The Women Veteran Health Committee at VISN 15 works to assist Women Veteran Program Managers and their facilities execute comprehensive planning for women's health issues that improve the overall quality of care provided to women Veterans. Below are some highlights and achievements from 2023:

- Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) training simulation conducted at Kansas City VAMC emergency department and community-based outpatient clinic.
- VA Women's Health offers three delivery types of mini-residency programs, national, local, and rural. In 2023 there were national Mini-Residency for Women's Health held in June, July and September 2023. The national training takes place over 3 days and covers core topics in women's health care in both the primary care and acute care settings. Training includes simulation training with



live patient models and simulation equipment for breast and pelvic examinations as well as small group case-based discussions. Across VISN 15, three rural mini-residencies were held at Eastern Kansas, Poplar Bluff and Marion. These trainings took place directly at rural clinic sites. Traveling teams went to rural sites to lead small group case-based discussions, hands-on learning with simulation equipment, interactive activities, and a live patient model. The total number of trained Providers in 2023 was 72, and the total number of Nurses trained in 2023 was 68.

- External Peer Review Program (EPRP) Cervical Cancer screening rates in VISN 15 aligned closely with the national average. Additionally, each VA Medical Center exceeded the community average rates for cervical cancer screening.
- Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) breast cancer screening rate for VISN 15 were marginally under the national average. Additionally, each VA Medical Center improved these screening rates from 2022.
- American Cancer Society (ACS) breast cancer screening rates in VISN 15 surpassed the national average. Additionally, VISN 15 piloted Electronic Quality Measures (eQM), where pilot screening data for VISN 15 exceeds the national breast cancer screening average.

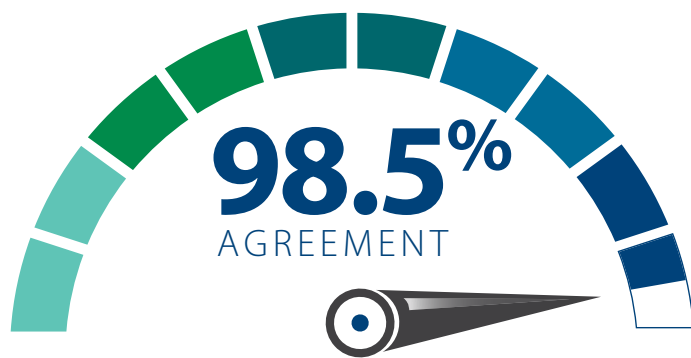
- VISN 15 Women Veteran Health Committee goals for 2023 included improvement in cervical cancer screening rates and breast cancer screening rates were achieved. Additional goal included successful completion of national review of Women Veteran Health Program at five of the seven VA Medical Centers, these were completed with results presented at PC Integrated Clinical Council (ICC) meeting.



Highlights from WVPM across VISN 15:

- WVPM's hosted events across the VISN to engage Women Veterans. Examples include, Baby Showers, Ladies' Day Out, Virtual Trainings on Women's Health, Heart Health and Breast Cancer.
- Quarterly focus groups are held with Women Veterans to engage in conversation about harassment and share services offered.
- Bi-Annual Town Halls for Women Veterans are held to provide useful information and elicit questions. More than 600 Women Veterans within VISN 15 are in attendance for each event. Facilities within VISN 15 work together to impact maximum number of Women Veterans within the catchment area. March and September town halls each reached 1500 Women Veterans.
- To increase communication to Women Veterans, VISN 15 established a Women's Health Chat Line, which is the first in the Nation. This chat line recently merged with the VISN 15 Whole Health chat line.
- In August 2023, Women's Health Chat Line was presented as a best practice for VISN 15 at the Patient-Aligned Care Team (PACT) to the Future Conference.

What Women Veterans are Saying



Satisfaction rate of 95.8% reported* by Women Veteran patients receiving care at VA Medical Centers across our VISN for their health needs!

*Based on comments received through VSignals.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Commitment Beyond Duty: Tireless Service to Fellow Veterans, On and Off Duty

Scott Sheridan (right), Health Systems Specialist at VISN 15 - VA Heartland Network, got involved with the Honor Flight Network of Kansas City program when he was the guardian of a Korean War Veteran on a flight in 2008. The hub is part of a nationwide program, Honor Flight Network, that believes in celebrating America's Veterans by inviting them to share in a day of honor at our nation's memorials. Honor Flights mission is one of gratitude for their service, sacrifice, and selflessness.

In 2009 Scott officially joined the hub as its military liaison. In the 16 years that has followed, he has held

multiple board positions to include Secretary, Vice President, and is the current President of this nonprofit organization.

There are over 120 hubs throughout the United States, including hubs in Hawaii and Puerto Rico with five Honor Flight hubs located throughout the VA Heartland Network -VISN 15 region. Since 2008, Honor Flight Network of Kansas City has flown over 1200 Veterans,

and Scott has been an integral part of many of those Veterans' journeys. Although many Veterans participating in the Honor Flight Network program



are Combat Veterans, combat experience is not required to participate.

During his time with the hub Scott said that "We have had the privilege of flying many highly decorated heroes during our trips, multiple sets of siblings, women veterans, and others, with our oldest Veteran being 102 years old." He always makes it a point to ask the Veterans where they get their health care and how they like what the VA does for them. "Their answers have always been overwhelmingly positive, and they love what we do for them."

Asked why he got involved with the program, he stated, "I do this to honor those who made it possible for me to have the career I did in the military and to thank them for their sacrifice and service."

The Honor Flight is free of charge for honorably discharged Veterans, with priority given to WWII, Korean, and Vietnam Veterans or those who meet specific medical criteria. Trips are funded through donations to the organization.

“I do this to honor those who made it possible for me to have the career I did in the military and to thank them for their sacrifice and service.”

- Scott Sheridan

CLINIC OPENINGS

GRAND OPENING AUGUST 2023



St. Charles County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

2845 Veterans Memorial Parkway, St. Charles, MO

PARENT FACILITY: St. Louis VA Healthcare System

SERVICES: Primary care, mental health, physical therapy, occupational therapy, whole health -- including chiropractic care--telehealth, teleretinal care and surgery consults to include audiology. Upgraded physical therapy facility at this site so we can have a dedicated gym with an overhead lift.



GRAND OPENING DECEMBER 2023



Hays Community Based Outpatient Clinic

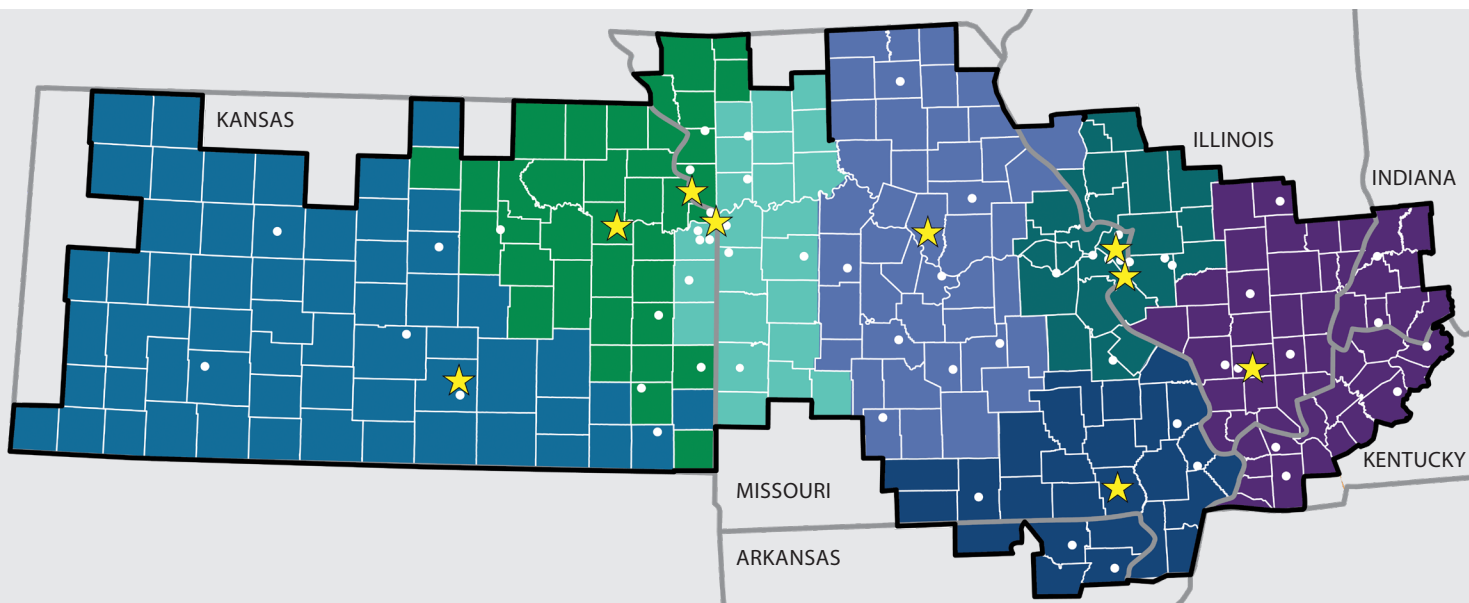
4107 Vine Street, Hays, KS

PARENT FACILITY: Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center

SERVICES: Primary care, laboratory and pathology services, pharmacy and telehealth services.



AROUND VISN 15



Providing High-Quality Health Care to **Veterans** across 263 counties in **Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, Indiana, and Arkansas.**

7 HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS

9 VA MEDICAL CENTERS

59 COMMUNITY BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS



Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center

5500 East Kellogg Drive
Wichita, KS 67218

Main phone: (316) 685-2221
Mental health care: (316) 651-3621

va.gov/wichita-health-care



Colmery-O'Neil VA Medical Center

2200 Southwest Gage Boulevard
Topeka, KS 66622

Main phone: (785) 350-3111
Mental health care: (785) 350-3111, ext. 54335

va.gov/eastern-kansas-health-care



Dwight D. Eisenhower VA Medical Center

4101 4th Street Trafficway
Leavenworth, KS 66048

Main phone: (13) 682-2000
Mental health care: (913) 682-2000, ext. 63481

va.gov/eastern-kansas-health-care

Total Veterans Served	29,140
Female Veterans Served	3,174
Admissions	2,084
Outpatient Visits	386,542
Employees	1,740

Total Veterans Served	38,818
Female Veterans Served	5,514
Admissions	2,071
Outpatient Visits	437,980
Employees	2,172



Kansas City, MO

Kansas City VA Medical Center

4801 Linwood Boulevard
Kansas City, MO 64128

Main phone: (816) 861-4700

Mental health care: (816) 861-4700, ext. 52641

va.gov/kansas-city-health-care

Total Veterans Served	54,882
Female Veterans Served	6,479
Admissions	6,040
Outpatient Visits	628,786
Employees	2,609



St. Louis, MO

John J. Cochran Veterans Hospital

915 North Grand Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63106

Main phone: (314) 652-4100

Mental health care: (314) 652-4100, ext. 66653

va.gov/st-louis-health-care

Total Veterans Served	63,954
Female Veterans Served	10,032
Admissions	6,806
Outpatient Visits	701,827
Employees	3,677



St. Louis, MO

St. Louis VA Medical Center - Jefferson Barracks

1 Jefferson Barracks Drive
St. Louis, MO 63125

Main phone: (314) 652-4100

Mental health care: (314) 652-4100, ext. 66653

va.gov/st-louis-health-care

Total Veterans Served	63,954
Female Veterans Served	10,032
Admissions	6,806
Outpatient Visits	701,827
Employees	3,677



Columbia, MO

Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital

800 Hospital Drive
Columbia, MO 65201

Main phone: (573) 814-6000

Mental health care: (573) 814-6486

va.gov/columbia-missouri-health-care

Total Veterans Served	42,317
Female Veterans Served	4,982
Admissions	4,066
Outpatient Visits	460,772
Employees	2,132



Poplar Bluff, MO

John J. Pershing VA Medical Center

1500 North Westwood Boulevard
Poplar Bluff, MO 63901

Main phone: (573) 686-4151

Mental health care: (888) 557-8262

va.gov/poplar-bluff-health-care

Total Veterans Served	23,780
Female Veterans Served	2,455
Admissions	270
Outpatient Visits	216,207
Employees	1,102



Marion, IL

Marion VA Medical Center

2401 West Main Street
Marion, IL 62959

Main phone: (618) 997-5311

Mental health care: (618) 997-5311, ext. 155300

va.gov/marion-health-care

Total Veterans Served	41,192
Female Veterans Served	3,571
Admissions	1,342
Outpatient Visits	382,528
Employees	1,737

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Heartland Network (VISN 15)



VA Heartland Network - VISN 15
1010 Walnut Street, Suite 210
Kansas City, MO 64106
(816) 701-3000
www.visn15.va.gov

