

## Veteran's Health Equity Podcast Transcript

### How VA Partnerships Promote Health Equity

>> I want to welcome everyone and thank you all for joining. My name is Lauren Korshak, and I lead awareness and translation activities for VA's Office of Health Equity. The Office of Health Equity was established in 2012. It champions the advancement of health equity and reducing health disparities in veterans. My job means that I get to tell stories about the VA's work to help veterans and the data we have about veterans and their health.

Today, on the Health Equity and Veterans podcast series, we'll be discussing who the National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships is and how their work serves as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of the affected partnerships at the national, state, and community level in advancing the health and healthy-being of veterans through exploration of innovative, safe, and emerging ethical therapies is helping VA to permit health equity and reduce disparities. Before we get started, I'm excited to introduce today's speaker, Dr. Tracy Weistreich, who oversees and leads the implementation at the National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships strategic public and private partnerships and small scale clinical program evaluations. Dr. Weistreich has extensive nursing and executive leadership experience and comprehensive knowledge of clinical nursing practice, healthcare administration, and regulatory requirements. As an Army Nurse Corps veteran, Dr. Weistreich completed her Ph.D. in Healthcare Administration from Touro University International and holds several additional degrees and certifications in nursing.

So I'm not sure if many people know that the VA has an office dedicated to establishing partnerships between non-governmental organizations and the Veterans Health Administration. Can you share more about the work that you're charged to do?

>> Thank you, Lauren; I would love to. VHA engages in public/private partnerships that leverage the full range of our nation's talent, ingenuity, and commitment to action. These partnerships further the VA's mission and priorities, but they also build capacity and create platforms for sharing resources to better serve veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors, and other beneficiaries. Enhancing community partnerships is an essential component of the VHA's strategic direction. Our office partnerships support VHA's commitment to providing excellent customer service, restoring public trust, and delivering personalized, proactive, patient-driven healthcare.

>> So, how does your work at establishing these partnerships help promote health equity and reduce disparities in veterans?

>> Our office is constantly exploring new and innovative ways to support the VA's mission. Augmenting services available through the VA with a focus on the social determinants of health, which, as you know, are the conditions in the environment where veterans live, learn, work, and socialize.

These include encouraging access to nutritious foods, permanent housing, jobs, education, and healthcare, including mental health. Suicide prevention is the number one clinical priority for the VA. It ensures that information is included in every partnership that we help facilitate. We know that underserved populations, minorities, and those most vulnerable are at risk related to the social

determinants of health. And these partnerships allow the VA to serve veterans in ways that VHA might not otherwise be able to do within its medical centers. Partnerships serve as force multipliers, creating ways to address gaps in care in both services and delivery due to legislative restrictions and the unavailability in different markets across the country.

For example, VA has a robust program to address homelessness. Still, we don't have the legal authority to provide furniture or other household goods. Working with these non-governmental partners, the VA's ability to help the veterans create a home. These partnerships also help us serve all veterans, including the underserved, minorities, and not enrolled or otherwise eligible for services.

Our office is part of the discovery, education, and affiliate network or DEAN, a group within the VA that includes the Office of Research and Development, the Office of Academic Affiliations, and the Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning. And together, we optimize access to services for all veterans, leveraging the latest research and industry expertise for veterans.

>> I think you all are engaged in a lot of work. If somebody is interested in learning more about all of your office's things or just how partnerships, in general, can help veterans, what can they do?

>> Well, there are many things that they can do, the first of which is contact us directly. We have a great deal of information available on our external facing website, located at [www.va.gov/healthpartnerships](http://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships), or for those of us who are internal to the VA, we also maintain a website that is the law. [oce.med.va.gov](http://oce.med.va.gov). Both of those contain information about the current partnerships that we have and how to get in touch with us directly.

We also have email access that's [VHAPartnerships@va.gov](mailto:VHAPartnerships@va.gov). People can reach out directly to us for opportunities related to partnerships other than we already have or community services that are interested in partnering with the VA. As we've noted, these partnerships are non-monetary with non-governmental organizations. Other components of the VA address inner governmental agreements or partnerships with organizations such as the Department of Health and Human Services. Those other organizations are available to us. If people have questions, they can contact us, and we can help get them to the right people.

>> Fabulous. Thank you so much. I just want to see if there is anything else you want to talk about before we close.

>> Absolutely, yes. One of the things that are common to both of us and has occurred to me over the last few years as there's been a more perfect light put on these issues, and that is that equal access to care resources is not the same as health equity. Fairness involves looking at individuals in communities to produce similar outcomes. And our partnerships leverage the expertise of our community to accomplish this, offering the appropriate accommodations and removing barriers.

These are essential. And as a healthcare organization and the largest integrated healthcare organization in the entire country, we have a responsibility to be models and mentors for health equity across the whole United States and possibly the world.

And the first step to being able to accomplish that is being informed and aware of the disparities. And the next step is to take action and use our voice for effective change. I really appreciate the opportunity through this podcast to be able to call to action, if you will, our community partners

To help us be creative in the way that we help our veterans. Our veterans are part of every community across the entire nation. And while the VA serves nine million veterans, there are another 11 or 12 million who do not receive their care through the VA.

And these partnerships are one way that we can reach these veterans across the entire United States. Many of these veterans are, as mentioned earlier, underserved, minority veterans, and veterans who really need the services that are available both through the VA and through the community.

Podcasts such as this really make that opportunity known to the general community to be creative and to look for ways to help veterans.

This includes identifying alternatives to the current way we're providing care and services. We have many food pantries, for example, that is across the nation, and these are fabulous, but for some of our veterans, particularly in the face of COVID, how do we encourage them to be able to get access to nutritious and the correct quantity of food to address food insecurity.

For people looking at jobs, how do we get them the training to be competitive for these jobs so that they can become independent, maintain stable housing, and maintain food security. So many of these social determinants of health are interrelated, and how can we help as a community come together to address the local needs?

>> Sounds like your partnerships are really able to fill in gaps and provide services that the VA isn't able to, and do things that the VA isn't able to, which I think is so important to promoting equity.

>> I would agree. One of the things that I think is confusing to some is why the VA can't provide everything. And many people don't realize that there are legislative restrictions that our authority to provide goods and services comes directly from Congress. And those authorities are the boundaries within which we provide the care and the benefits. And we deliver outstanding, excellent care. And these partnerships really expand that to include all those services we can't offer and to reach all those veterans that we really need to reach to promote health equity and wellness across the entire nation.

>> Thank you so much.

I appreciate all of the work you and your colleagues are doing to really be creative about how we can all work together in VA and across the nation to support all of our veterans. And I do want to thank everyone for joining. I hope you all will join us on our next episode.