

# 2019



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER  
VOLUME 03 ISSUE 01  
MARCH 2019

VHA's Office of Community Engagement and the  
Center for Compassionate Care Innovation

## SETTING THE STAGE FOR WHAT'S TO COME

### Welcome to 2019!

The Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Community Engagement (OCE) and Center for Compassionate Care Innovation (CCI) is working hard to bring new health care and supportive services to Veterans through strategic public-private partnerships and small-scale clinical innovations.

We look forward to sharing updates with you throughout the year, showcasing the efforts being put forth to improve Veterans' access to quality care through partnerships and innovations. Stay tuned for more!

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration





# OCE Partnerships

We'll be sharing updates about a number of partnerships in the near future, including the following:

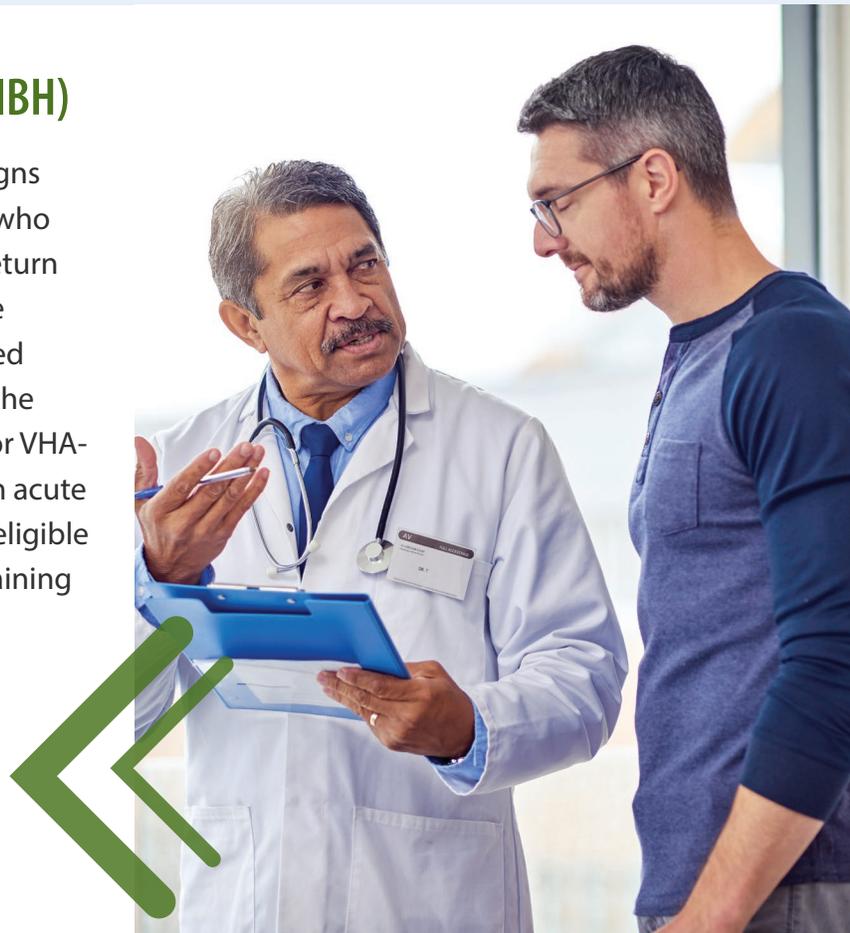
## Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)

In 2017, VA announced a partnership with HSUS called Operation Hero-Animal Bond. The partnership, which can pair Veterans with rescue animals, encourages Veterans to consider pet ownership. It also encourages Veterans to consider participating in volunteer opportunities with local community animal shelters and humane societies, which can reduce the social isolation some Veterans experience. Through this partnership, OCE and HSUS work together to communicate the many benefits that pets and Veterans bring to each other's lives.

## Marcus Institute for Brain Health (MIBH)

Through VHA's partnership with MIBH, VHA assigns a nurse or social worker as a liaison to Veterans who have sought care at MIBH and then chosen to return to VHA treatment. This liaison works to meet the ongoing health care needs of Veterans diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury (TBI). The goals of the partnership are to optimize care coordination for VHA-enrolled Veterans after they are discharged from acute self-referred treatment at MIBH and to support eligible Veterans who want to enroll in VHA care, maintaining continuity of treatment.

*OCE's partnerships utilize coordinated efforts to increase Veterans' access to quality health care, wherever they are.*



## Veterans Hub

The Institute for Healthcare Improvement's 100 Million Healthier Lives initiative is working toward a **goal of 100 million people living healthier lives by 2020**. The Veterans Hub is one of the initiative's seven topical hubs and aims to create a network of organizations and coalitions working to empower Veterans to be the healthiest versions of themselves. The hub program will strive to meet the goal of 20 million Veterans leading healthier lives by increasing food security, access to employment, safe housing, and more.



*The health and well-being of Veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors is the top priority of OCE and CCI.*

## Medical-Legal Partnerships

These nonmonetary partnerships bring together VA medical facilities and volunteer attorneys who provide services to Veterans at no cost. Veterans, including those experiencing homelessness, ranked affordable legal assistance high on their list of unmet needs in a **2016 VA survey**. Legal issues can also directly affect Veterans' health. For example, a Veteran experiencing stress because of a child custody dispute cannot fully focus on recovering from a health issue. After screening Veterans for unmet legal needs, VA medical teams can refer Veterans to on-site legal clinics where attorneys provide free services for noncriminal legal issues, in areas such as family law, landlord-tenant disputes, and elder law.

## Veterans Community Partnerships (VCPs)

These represent a national initiative that ensures all Veterans and their caregivers have access to, and a wide range of choices among, the services that allow Veterans to stay in the places they call home. VCPs comprise Veterans and their caregivers, VA facilities, community health care providers, and organizations and agencies working together to foster seamless access to care and support services at VA and in Veteran communities.



# CCI Innovations

## Mental Health Mobility Service Dog Initiative

Service dogs are specially trained to perform tasks or for people with a chronic disability. For example, service dogs can pick things up, alert people who are deaf, or retrieve medications or a phone. These are working animals, not pets, and VA supports their use by providing veterinary health benefits, specialty equipment, and Veteran training. This initiative extends the VA veterinary benefits to Veterans with mental health disorders that substantially limit mobility for whom service dogs are the most appropriate means of improving mobility. It provides comprehensive insurance coverage for the dog's health and wellness. Only dogs trained by Assistance Dogs International-accredited agencies are eligible for these benefits.

## Light-Emitting Diode (LED) Treatment

A home-based LED treatment program was initiated at the VA Boston Healthcare System's TBI clinic in 2018. This program provides Veterans who have a history of mild to moderate TBI, who are reporting symptoms consistent with TBI for six months or more, with access to LED devices in their homes. During the 12-week course of treatment, clinicians contact the patient through telehealth services. Of the 59 Veterans who received the LED home treatment after the demonstration in Boston, 37 subsequently completed a 12-week follow-up evaluation. The vast majority of those Veterans demonstrated improvement in at least two functional domains such as attention, mood, or sleep. VA staff members report that Veterans consistently use the LED devices and that many Veterans enjoy the treatment and find it "relaxing." Some Veterans have reported that they have benefited more from LED treatment than from prescription medication. There is emerging evidence suggesting that LED therapy promotes a healing response at the cellular level, due in part to increased blood flow.

## Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memory (RTM)

CCI is working to more widely offer this specialized psychotherapy technique to Veterans diagnosed with PTSD. RTM helps Veterans restructure or reconsolidate an original, traumatic memory in a way that reduces or removes the negative response that was originally triggered by the memory. RTM is available in cooperation with Vet Centers along the East Coast.



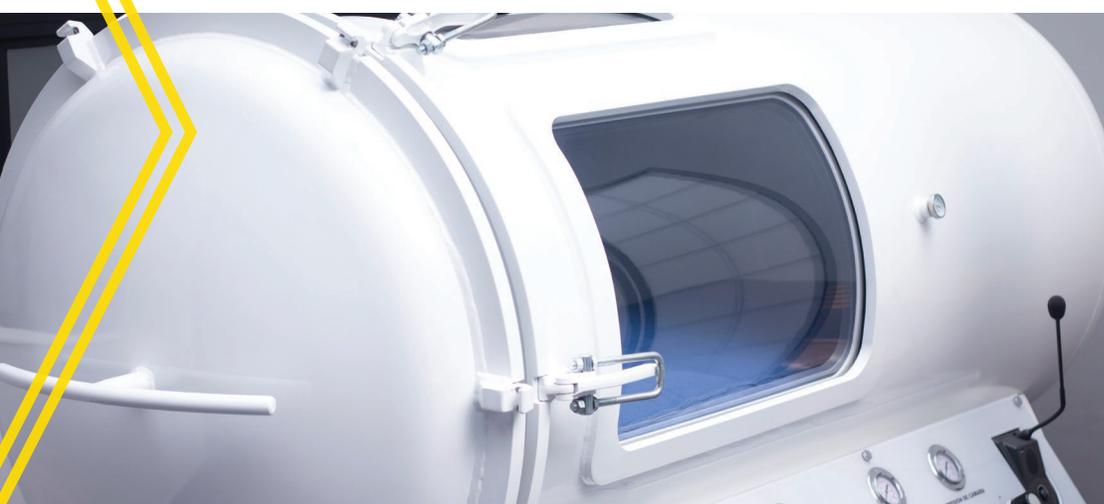
## Stellate Ganglion Block (SGB)

Emerging research suggests that the SGB procedure, commonly performed by anesthesia providers to relieve chronic pain, may also help Veterans struggling with PTSD. During the procedure, a health care provider uses X-ray or ultrasound imaging to guide a needle into a bundle of nerves (the stellate ganglion) at the base of the neck. Then, the provider injects a local anesthetic into the nerve tissue, blocking pain and other impulses. There growing evidence to suggest that this procedure may alleviate symptoms of PTSD like hyperarousal and anxiety; it appears to calm the exaggerated “fight or flight” survival reflex in those living with PTSD.

CCI has been working with the staff at the Long Beach VA Medical Center to better understand the use of SGB to treat PTSD. Only 11 out of 143 VA facilities reported using the procedure to treat PTSD in 2018. By better understanding the current use of SGB to treat PTSD, more Veterans may be able to benefit from this innovative application of the procedure.

## Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT)

VHA is currently engaged in a clinical demonstration project using HBOT for treatment of PTSD symptoms. HBOT is a procedure that increases the amount of oxygen in the body’s cells, under pressure. Patients undergoing the procedure sit inside a specially designed chamber and are monitored by certified HBOT specialists. The clinical demonstration is currently ongoing at four VA facilities, which are exploring outcomes and operational requirements. Veterans who are considered for the treatment must have failed to respond to two other evidence-based treatments and have a diagnosis of PTSD, with or without TBI.



## OCE's MISSION

To serve as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community level. OCE serves as a facilitator or access point for public and private entities interested in partnering with VHA to benefit Veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors.

## CCI's MISSION

To explore emerging therapies that are safe and ethical in order to enhance Veterans’ physical and mental well-being when other treatments have not been successful. CCI prioritizes proposals that have current or emerging evidence documenting their efficacy, are cleared by the Food and Drug Administration for their intended purpose, and offer sustained benefits to the target population.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Stay tuned for more news and updates about the above partnerships, innovations, and more.

Visit the CCI website at [www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/index.asp](http://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/index.asp) and subscribe to our newsletter by entering your email address.

View our latest partnership updates at [www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/partnershipupdates.asp](http://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/partnershipupdates.asp).

Email [CommunityEngagement@va.gov](mailto:CommunityEngagement@va.gov) to partner with OCE and help address Veterans’ health care needs.