

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Community Engagement and  
Center for Compassionate Care Innovation

# 2020 PUBLIC ANNUAL REPORT

**VA**



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

Veterans Health Administration



# 2020 Public Annual Report

Office of Community Engagement (OCE)  
Center for Compassionate Care Innovation (CCI)

**VA**



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

Veterans Health Administration

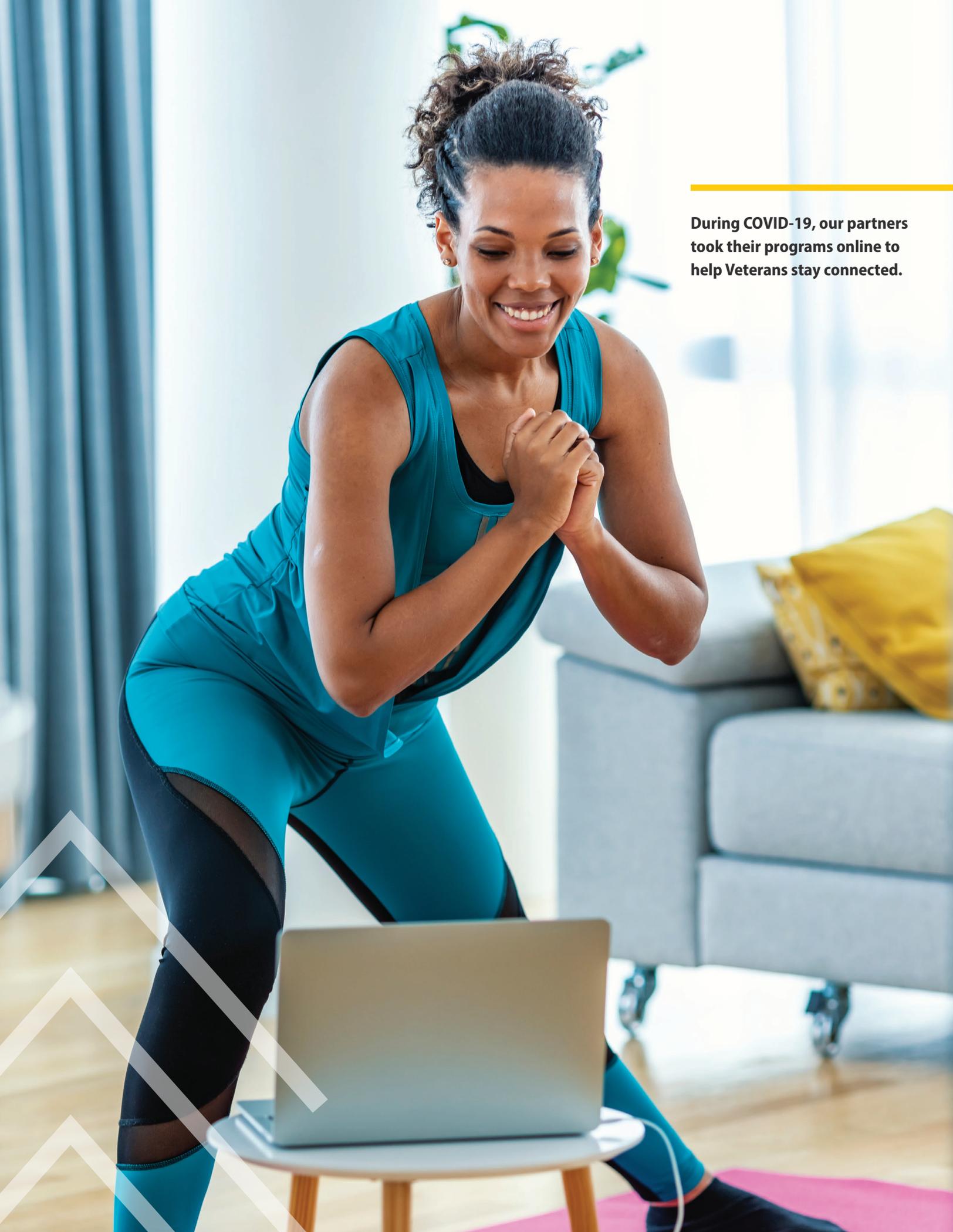
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**During COVID-19, our partners  
took their programs online to  
help Veterans stay connected.**

# Letter from the Nurse Executive



The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Community Engagement (OCE) and the Center for Compassionate Care Innovation (CCI), a program within OCE, have had countless noteworthy successes in fiscal year (FY) 2020. We are one team with two missions, both focused on innovative ways to help our nation's heroes. One fosters partnerships that help Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors by improving their sense of social connectedness and creating access to necessities such as employment, housing, and food security. The other explores safe, ethical, and innovative treatments for conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

We deeply value and appreciate the commitment our partners have to helping Veterans live healthier, happier lives. They confirmed their commitment earlier this year, rising to the challenge, taking their programs online during the coronavirus pandemic. These efforts helped ensure Veterans had access to the latest health information about physical distancing and other recommendations to stop the spread of COVID-19. Our partners also promoted healthy activities for Veterans including virtual exercise classes and ways to remain connected to friends, family, and volunteers who would normally have been able to visit in person.

Likewise, CCI, which explores innovative treatments, also achieved positive outcomes for Veterans. For instance, more than 120 Veterans were successfully treated with non-invasive light-emitting diode (LED) therapy for traumatic brain injury symptoms, with many reporting sustained improvements. As one Veteran put it, "I sleep so much better. I'm much more likely to be active and engaged in doing things. In general, I feel better. It really has made a significant change to me, personally."

As a team that is dedicated to bettering life for Veterans, our office has also provided fundamental and functional pieces in The President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS). A tenet of PREVENTS is that suicide is everyone's business. Our office will continue to play a significant role in the development and implementation of the PREVENTS executive order. We are engaging with other program offices across VHA and will be having discussions about providing resources, services, and programs to Veterans to improve their health and well-being especially when they are experiencing challenging times.

One last item of note for FY20 is that OCE and CCI are now aligned under the leadership of VHA's Office of Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks (DEAN) as part of a modernization effort within VHA. We are looking forward to the synergy that being part of this office, which also promotes partnerships and innovations, will provide. As part of the new alignment in October, our office name will change to the *National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships* to reflect the combined mission of our office.

In good health,

**Dr. Tracy L. Weistreich**

*Nurse Executive, VHA Office of Community Engagement  
and Center for Compassionate Care Innovation*



# Introduction

**Partnerships increase, by an order of magnitude, the services, value, and innovation that the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is able to provide to America's Veterans.**

The dedicated team at VHA's **Office of Community Engagement** (OCE) and the **Center for Compassionate Care Innovation** (CCI), a program within OCE, begin each day focused on their mission to enhance Veterans' physical and mental health and well-being. Their work involves helping Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors by fostering strategic public-private partnerships and safe medical innovations for Veterans who have not achieved optimal outcomes with evidence-based therapies.

This fiscal year (Oct. 1, 2019—Sept. 30, 2020) has seen additional challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic. Neither VHA as a whole nor OCE and CCI have wavered in their execution of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) "**Fourth Mission**," which involves taking actions to ensure continued service to Veterans in the face of national emergencies such as COVID-19. As the largest integrated health care system in the United States, VHA serves more than 9 million Veterans, and the OCE and CCI team is firmly committed to not leaving a single one of them behind. OCE's partnerships build capacity and allow for more resource-sharing to better serve Veterans, and CCI's innovations support and augment other VHA health care programs to enhance Veterans' treatment. Ultimately, OCE and CCI's work can help Veterans experience healthier, happier, more well-rounded lives.

## **One team, dual missions, in service to all Veterans**

An encouraging refrain arose during the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic: We are all in this together. OCE, as VHA's trusted resource for partnership growth on behalf of Veterans everywhere, has always acted upon this idea of togetherness, that collaboration begets positive results. What is true for all of us is true for the well-being of Veterans: Collaboration, partnership, and combining resources leads to a better quality of life. The OCE team pours passion and expertise into the creation of relationships with community partners and other VHA staff members while maintaining **VA's core values**:

Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. Even outside of an extraordinary event such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Veterans throughout the country need support, resources, and tools for self-care and self-empowerment—partnerships augment VHA's ability to fulfill these needs.

CCI's key principle is right there in its name: innovation. The aim of this program within OCE is to help Veterans access safe and ethical emerging therapies for suicidality, PTSD, TBI, and chronic pain. When other treatments have not been successful, the forward-thinking therapies and treatments supported by CCI can help bring Veterans some relief from their symptoms. A program office that places innovation at the forefront of its work is in line with VHA's position as a **Learning Organization**. Back in 2007, VHA set a goal to transition the administration to one that "integrates learning into the work of the organization and drives performance." Learning organizations, among other things, "foster innovation," and "increase the ability of the organization to manage change." These pursuits are woven into the fabric of CCI—the very existence of the program is based on the idea that when one treatment does not work, we must take that as an opportunity to improve, and try another.



OCE, too, evinces VHA's status as a Learning Organization. When OCE helps create partnerships at the national, state, and community level, a few critical things happen: Nongovernmental partners bring more resources and knowledge to the table; these partners offer their talents, ingenuity, and commitment to action to partnerships that augment what VHA is already able to provide; and partnerships increase VHA's ability to provide stellar customer service and deliver personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care. Simply put, partnerships bolster VHA's ability to manage change because the administration cannot execute on its mission entirely alone—when things are moving fast, when Veterans' needs grow, when new technologies or strategies are required, partners contribute to the efforts to help Veterans live better lives. The team behind every partnership grows stronger. We're all in this together.

Both OCE and CCI fit into VHA's journey of becoming a **High Reliability Organization** (HRO) as well; that journey kicked off shortly before this fiscal year began. At their core, HROs put procedures and protocols in place that maximize safety and minimize harm. OCE and CCI fit into this picture seamlessly:

- **OCE serves** as a trusted, safe resource for partnership building and growth; all of the nongovernmental, nonmonetary partnerships OCE works to establish undergo a rigorous due diligence and internal review process that determines whether potential partners act in the best interest of Veterans' safety, health, and well-being.
- **CCI endeavors** to maintain the integrity of the fundamental principle to "Do No Harm;" all the emerging therapies it supports are described as "safe" and "ethical."

## Thriving Veterans, thriving communities

Everything that OCE and CCI team members do is driven by the idea of supporting Veterans so that they can succeed. The OCE and CCI team works on behalf of those who have served our country, and on behalf of Veterans' families, caregivers, and survivors. VA's priorities and strategic goals are at the forefront of the team's work, too. For example: Partnerships and innovations support the **MISSION Act** by bringing Veterans more options for their health and well-being; strategic partners with Veteran interests in mind provide emotionally-resonant offerings to Veterans, leading to better customer service; and OCE and CCI's partnerships and innovations consistently include suicide prevention strategies and awareness and caregiver support resources in their memoranda of agreement.

### VA has four strategic goals:

- That Veterans choose VA;
- That Veterans receive reliable care and support and excellent customer service;
- That Veterans trust VA; and
- That VA will focus resources more efficiently and transform business operations to become more competitive.

OCE and CCI's own goals are in line with VA's, and the team keeps in mind how it can best add value as it works on behalf of Veterans everywhere.

## Leveraging exceptional expertise

OCE serves as VHA's partnership expert and has for more than seven years. Comprising individuals with diverse backgrounds and expertise, the **team** includes registered nurses, social workers, and health systems specialists with experience in ethics, compliance, nursing, mental health services and policy, psychology, benefits administration, and much more.

OCE has two licensed clinical social workers on staff who are experts in the **social determinants of health (SDOH)**. Support for the SDOH is the focus of many of the partnerships OCE manages and/or facilitates for other VHA offices, and the six new partnerships OCE finalized just this year—and the nine more in the pipeline—**increase Veterans' access to SDOH.**

### The Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

The SDOH are conditions in the lives and environments where Veterans live, learn, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. When Veterans have access to positive SDOH, they lead healthier lives.

Some SDOH include education, employment, food security, housing, spiritual support, and transportation.

Randy Moler is a licensed clinical social worker and program analyst at OCE. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, he's used his expertise in the SDOH to help the National Social Work Program office in the areas of patient discharge planning, how Veterans can combat isolation during the pandemic, how social workers can modify their practice to incorporate telehealth, and more. That work, which further supported VA's Fourth Mission, went above and beyond OCE's everyday functions—all in the pursuit of helping more Veterans.



The OCE and CCI team members' expertise in collaboration, as well as several team members' backgrounds in public health, mental health, psychology, nursing, and specific areas of health care, also enable them to work effectively and knowledgeably within the OCE program.

Both entities' missions are clear: To use experience, skill, expertise, compassion, knowledge, and passion to create better health care outcomes for Veterans.

## Providing consultation and building connections

OCE assists with partnership creation and consultation on behalf of other offices and field-based employees—meaning the team works closely with other stakeholders across the enterprise when OCE is not the primary contact on the memorandum of agreement—and also manages partnerships itself, providing administrative oversight. These consultative services yield relationships with community partners, who in turn help Veterans.

OCE makes critical linkages that many program offices and field-based staff members might not know exist or might not know how to access. The experts on OCE's staff help potential internal and external partners navigate the VA system to achieve a nonmonetary agreement that has been vetted by subject matter experts and VA's Office of General Counsel. Ultimately, the OCE team's collective expertise enables each team member to make connections that bring more resources to Veterans. OCE prides itself on its accessibility, and all someone has to do to get started with partnership creation is contact the team via email, at [communityengagement@va.gov](mailto:communityengagement@va.gov).

Additionally, CCI-driven projects are themselves partnerships that thrive by way of strong connections and working relationships—CCI team members collaborate with health care providers in VA medical centers throughout the country on emerging therapies to treat suicidality, PTSD, TBI, and chronic pain.

## Building trust

Is this in the Veteran's best interest? This is the simple litmus test that OCE and CCI team members use to scrutinize every potential partnership or innovation before considering it for implementation. The team works to ensure that partnerships and innovations will be safe, effective, and meaningful for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. They understand that building Veterans' trust in VA is among the administration's strategic goals, and OCE and CCI are working to build that trust every day.

When a person or entity **submits a proposal** to CCI, safety comes first. CCI team members thoroughly assess proposals to determine that the fundamental “Do No Harm” principle is evident. The proposals that CCI reviews undergo extensive evaluation standards—with fairness and objectivity—to measure if they meet CCI’s criteria to be safe, effective, ethical, and innovative.

This review process is comprehensive and can take several months. When it comes to Veterans’ trust in every element of the care they receive at VHA, safety supersedes speed.

OCE, too, centers Veterans’ trust in all of its work. The process of determining which partnerships to pursue is a rigorous one, and OCE team members ask themselves several questions as they consider partnerships: Would this partnership be good for Veterans? Are there any legal or ethical barriers to the partnership’s services? Is partnering with this organization or entity consistent with the mission, vision, and values of a public agency that provides care and services to Veterans?

OCE also conducts a standard business vetting. For example, OCE team members look up a potential nonprofit partner on the Better Business Bureau to evaluate its customer feedback, and also look into IRS documentation, negative reviews, scandals, bad press, and consider legal issues. A potential partner must work with Veterans in a manner that supports Veterans’ needs, VHA’s goals, and VA’s mission.

If the internal review process reveals the organization to be a good fit for VA, OCE then facilitates a discovery meeting with all key stakeholders to answer additional questions: What is the purpose of the partnership? What are VHA’s and partners’ responsibilities? How will the partners achieve goals and measure outcomes? These questions, too, have a goal: To create meaningful, impactful, and effective partnerships so that Veterans continue to trust and turn to VHA and VA for their needs.

Building trust is not quick work. This line of questioning, this curiosity and scrutiny, this application of deep analysis to all of OCE and CCI’s partnerships and innovations—it is all a means to the end goal of Veterans’ health and well-being.

## **Offering honest service**

OCE and CCI team members are driven by an earnest belief in VA’s mission. All the hard work, all the advanced degrees, the business due diligence, all the questions, all the months and months of processes and evaluation comes down to this core principle: Strategic public-private partnerships and small-scale clinical demonstrations are good for Veterans. All of the team’s efforts and every ounce of their passion is intended to serve Veterans.

Many of the people behind the projects at OCE and CCI are the mothers, wives, granddaughters, sons, and daughters of Veterans. One OCE and CCI team member has had at least one member of her family serve in every major war or conflict since the American Revolution. OCE and CCI’s Nurse Executive Dr. Weistreich is herself a Veteran of the Army Nurse Corps. The people who work on behalf of Veterans each and every day at OCE and CCI imbue their work with great respect, personal sentiment, and solemnity, which only makes the steps they take for Veterans more meaningful.

As this report will highlight, OCE and CCI's work has done great things for Veterans this year. To feature just a few key examples, since October 2019, the team has enabled:

- Animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy that has brought smiles to Veterans' faces by way of therapy animal visits at VA medical centers;
- Crisis alleviation and suicide prevention services through the push of a button in Veterans' General Motors cars;
- Access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, so that their families never feel the effects of going hungry.

Each of these examples is one that supports Veterans' SDOH, such as access to health care services, social support, and food security. Since access to positive SDOH are so inextricably linked to better health care outcomes for Veterans, the OCE and CCI team are proud to support partnerships and innovations that center on these important conditions in the environments where Veterans live.

It bears repeating: All of OCE's partnerships and CCI's innovations are *for* Veterans and *good for* Veterans. OCE and CCI operate in service to those who have served our country and made great sacrifices, as well as their beneficiaries, families, caregivers, survivors, and communities—those are the individuals OCE and CCI team members are thinking about, day in and day out.



# FY20 OCE New Partnerships

**Partnerships do not materialize overnight.** It can take months or even years to take an idea for a partnership from concept to implementation. As the experts in partnership-building within VHA, we take great care to find partners whose missions align with VA and VHA and to ensure that the partnership is an appropriate fit for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors through our due diligence process that includes formal vetting. The following partnerships were initiated or renewed in FY20.

## GO<sub>2</sub> Foundation for Lung Cancer

The goals of this partnership are to increase Veteran lung cancer screening and earlier health care interventions. VHA's National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention is also focused on **screening for lung cancer**, and offers informative resources for Veterans about screenings and VA's work in this area. VA diagnoses 7,700 Veterans with lung cancer each year and an estimated 900,000 remain at risk. In addition to increased access to lung cancer screening for Veterans through its national network of more than 700 screening centers, GO<sub>2</sub> Foundation is working with VHA to provide additional resources for screening implementation, professional development training, patient education campaigns, and potential research programs.

## MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

VHA and MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger have formed a partnership to improve Veterans' access to food security. MAZON leads a national effort to eliminate barriers to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps to keep food on the table for an estimated 1.4 million Veterans. The partnership increases awareness about the risks associated with food insecurity and options to address it through outreach to Veterans. MAZON is a national advocacy organization working to end hunger among people of all faiths in the United States and Israel.

## OnStar

This partnership supports Veterans who experience crisis and increases suicide prevention services for them, as suicide prevention is the top clinical priority for VA.



VHA and OnStar will work together to reduce deaths by suicide by providing additional resources for Veterans (who own GM vehicles and have a subscription to OnStar) in crisis or emotional distress; the partners will also work to utilize OnStar as a resource that VA clinicians can use in developing enhanced suicide prevention safety plans for Veterans.

## Parkinson's Foundation

VHA and the Parkinson's Foundation work together to increase Veterans' and health care providers' access to Parkinson's disease information and resources, educate and train VA staff on disease management, and improve service coordination and navigation for Veterans. The Foundation supports outreach efforts that promote education and awareness among Veterans. The Foundation's goal is to make life better for people with Parkinson's disease by improving care and advancing research toward a cure. It is estimated that 80,000 Veterans suffer from Parkinson's disease. VA operates six specialized Parkinson's Disease Research, Education, and Clinical Centers (PADRECCs), which assist Veterans in effectively managing Parkinson's and other movement disorders by way of VA pharmacy benefits, physical, occupational, and speech therapies, medical equipment, surgical services, and other valuable resources. PADRECCs offer state-of-the-art clinical care, education, research, and national outreach and advocacy.

## Pet Partners

Pet Partners has partnered with VHA to develop opportunities for Veterans to benefit from pet visitation, clinical interventions with therapy animals, and other activities and events. The aim of this partnership is to bring to more Veteran patients the benefits of the human-animal bond. Research shows that people in contact with animals may experience lower blood pressure, reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, lessened anxiety and pain, and decreased feelings of loneliness. Pet Partners volunteer teams have long made visits to patients in VA medical centers. When COVID-19 made in-person visits impossible, Pet Partners volunteers started emailing photos of the animals to patients and conducting Facebook Live events to stay engaged with Veterans.

## Y-USA

Through this partnership, renewed in 2019, VHA employees throughout the country work with local YMCAs to connect Veterans to opportunities for exercise, physical movement, and socialization. Veterans can access volunteer opportunities plus services and benefits in the areas of healthy lifestyle programming and community reintegration. In addition, Y-USA is offering free, online, on-demand fitness videos through its ["YMCA 360" platform](#) in response to stay-at-home orders issued due to COVID-19.



# Coronavirus Response

With the arrival of COVID-19, VA implemented an aggressive public health response to protect and care for Veterans, their families, health care providers, and employees in the face of this emerging health risk.

As physical distancing measures went into effect in spring 2020, many in-person activities associated with VHA partnerships could no longer take place. Many partners implemented virtual options to ensure that Veterans would be able to maintain social connectedness, develop new healthy alternatives to their routine way of self-care, and expand their awareness of available resources to address their health concerns.

Y-USA, for example, made sure Veterans could initiate or maintain exercise routines by offering online fitness classes. Pet Partners' volunteer animal handlers, who would normally interact with VA patients in person, started offering Facebook Live events and sending pictures of the animals to Veterans. Pet Partners also found a way to help families of Veterans by implementing a new program, "We Are All Ears," designed to help children maintain their reading skills by reading to their pets, especially because so many children were unable to be in the classroom.

The arrival of COVID-19 also brought on numerous hardships like job loss, which, in turn, affects Veterans' food security. One of OCE's newest partners, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, started coordinating with partners and other colleagues across the country, gathering the latest information, and advocating at the federal and state level for swift and effective action to expand access to food assistance for Veterans and other affected people.





**Our partners support social  
connectedness, an important  
social determinant of health.**

# FY20 Partnerships in Development



OCE is currently working on these in-development partnerships within VHA to help improve Veterans' physical and mental health and well-being, as well as their access to positive SDOH, such as employment, food security, economic stability, and their sense of social connectedness. These collaborations will augment the array of services available throughout VHA.

## American Kidney Fund

While VHA is in the process of exploring a partnership with American Kidney Fund (AKF), the nonprofit is currently offering a blog with information, resources, and news about kidney disease for patients and their caregivers, and an emergency fund to provide grants to some patients diagnosed with kidney disease. AKF is also advocating for [federal emergency assistance](#) for dialysis patients and is offering tips for people to take advantage of during COVID-19, such as "[tips for a kidney-friendly pandemic pantry](#)." AKF's resources will augment VHA's. Both entities are focused on education, screenings, and mental and emotional support. The prevalence of chronic kidney disease in the Veteran population is estimated to be 34% higher than in the general population.

## American Lung Association

VA and the American Lung Association (ALA) have a shared goal to improve Veterans' health and well-being through collaborative education and services for Veterans living with lung disease. According to [ongoing VA research](#) on respiratory health, Veterans may suffer from respiratory diseases such as lung cancer, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. These diseases place Veterans at greater risk for additional harm from COVID-19. In light of the pandemic, ALA is working to educate the public, including Veterans, about ways to stay safe through webinars and a forum for individuals to ask questions of experts directly.

## Arthritis Foundation

VHA and the Arthritis Foundation are developing a partnership to provide Veterans and their family members, caregivers, and survivors with education and resources to navigate the many challenges associated with arthritis and to gain a better understanding of the needs and the gaps that may exist in the care of Veterans who are diagnosed with this chronic disease. The Arthritis Foundation is pursuing a cure for arthritis, which is the nation's most common cause of disability, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## CancerCare

VHA and CancerCare are exploring a partnership to improve the health care and outcomes of Veterans diagnosed with any type of cancer, and their support networks, through awareness and outreach. CancerCare offers: [online support groups](#), [a podcast miniseries](#) about the current impact on the cancer community, [financial resources and grants](#) for eligible cancer patients, and more.

## FRAC

Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national nonprofit organization working to eradicate poverty-related hunger and undernutrition in the United States. VHA has had a working relationship with FRAC for years to support its efforts to eliminate barriers to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) access and to support Veterans and other vulnerable populations.

## Heroes Foundation

The Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation is in discussions to create a partnership with VHA designed to match Veterans, transitioning service members, and their spouses with careers in Veteran-friendly companies. The Heroes Foundation partners with Veteran-friendly companies to help them develop strong Veteran-centric programs that enhance recruitment strategies, career mobility, health and wellness, talent development, and an inclusive culture.

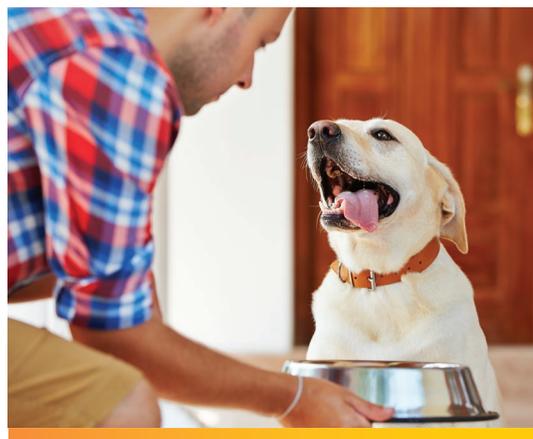
## Imerman Angels

VHA is in the process of exploring a partnership with Imerman Angels, a cancer support network community. The nonprofit helps support Veterans' positive SDOH by providing a strong support network to address social isolation and may help reduce suicide in this vulnerable group of Veterans. This partnership's overall aim is to provide increased outreach to Veterans, family members, caregivers, and survivors who are in or out of the VA health system access to a cancer patient support network, educational material, and a cancer survivor mentor for one-on-one support.

## Pet Peace of Mind

A developing partnership between VHA and the nonprofit Pet Peace of Mind (PPOM) will help Veteran patients at VA health care facilities secure care for their beloved pets during a patient's course of medical treatment. As part of this partnership, VHA and PPOM will develop and grow animal fostering programs at VA facilities that may be accessed when Veterans require medical treatment and have no one to care for their pets.

VHA and PPOM will establish several pilot sites where VA volunteers are trained to provide foster care for Veterans' pets. The goal is to work toward expanding the partnership nationally. **PPOM**, which was established in 2009, utilizes volunteers and trains them to foster pets when patients receive medical care or are receiving hospice and palliative care.



## Salesforce Military

VHA and Salesforce Military are developing a partnership to support Veterans who are transitioning out of active duty and into the civilian workforce as well as their spouses by connecting them with skill development, career advancement, and employment resources. Since its launch in 2014, Salesforce Military has provided military personnel, Veterans, and their spouses with high-demand technology skills and certifications at no cost to help Veterans secure meaningful careers. The proposed partnership will facilitate improvement in the quality of life and overall well-being of Veterans by addressing needs across SDOH, such as economic stability, employment, and health literacy. Salesforce Military will provide direct links to VA resources and information about suicide prevention and how Veterans, their spouses, and employers can reduce the risk for suicide in their homes, businesses, and communities.

# VHA Community Partnership Challenge

This annual contest highlights nonmonetary community partnerships between VHA and nongovernmental organizations that serve Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Each year, VHA's executive in charge recognizes the top three partnerships that are taking place across the nation between VA facilities and community organizations. These are grassroots partnerships led by VHA employees who are providing direct care to Veterans in their communities, truly meeting Veterans where they are in terms of their greatest needs that cannot be fulfilled by VHA alone.

The theme of the 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge is SDOH—the conditions in the environments where Veterans live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. This year's Challenge focuses on six SDOH: education, employment, food security, housing, spiritual support, and transportation, all of which have been impacted by the pandemic and resulting stay-at-home orders. The support and resources provided by VHA's partners are so critical right now with so many Americans experiencing job loss and the ability to pay for necessities like housing and food.

Each year OCE publicizes the three winners of the VHA Community Partnership Challenge, which makes the public aware of the great work being done within VHA and serves as a model for other VHA employees to create partnerships and share ideas and best practices with one another. As the VHA subject matter and process experts on nonmonetary partnerships with nongovernmental organizations, OCE is happy to lend its expertise in this area to VA and VHA staff members.



# CCI Highlights and Accomplishments

In FY20, CCI continued to support the following clinical innovations, with the following results:

➤ **LED (light-emitting diode) therapy:** Since 2018, when CCI began collaborating with the Boston TBI (traumatic brain injury) clinic on a home-based LED treatment program for Veterans diagnosed with TBI, more than 120 Veterans have been successfully treated, with many reporting symptom improvements across multiple domains. Evidence suggests that LED therapy promotes healing at the cellular level, due in part to increased blood flow. Research on LED therapy suggests that the treatment may help with symptoms associated with TBI, such as mood, memory, or attention. During the treatment, patients who have mild to moderate TBI, and who have reported symptoms consistent with TBI for six months or more, wear a lightweight headset affixed with LEDs.

Patients usually begin treatment with an outpatient visit supervised by polytrauma clinical staff. Veterans then complete 30-minute treatment sessions at home three times a week for 12 weeks. Clinicians check in on their progress regularly via telehealth technology and in-office visits at six, 12, and 24 weeks after the initial treatment. Recently all treatment sessions, including the first visit, have been offered virtually. In accordance with COVID-19 recommendations, they were conducted as telehealth appointments.

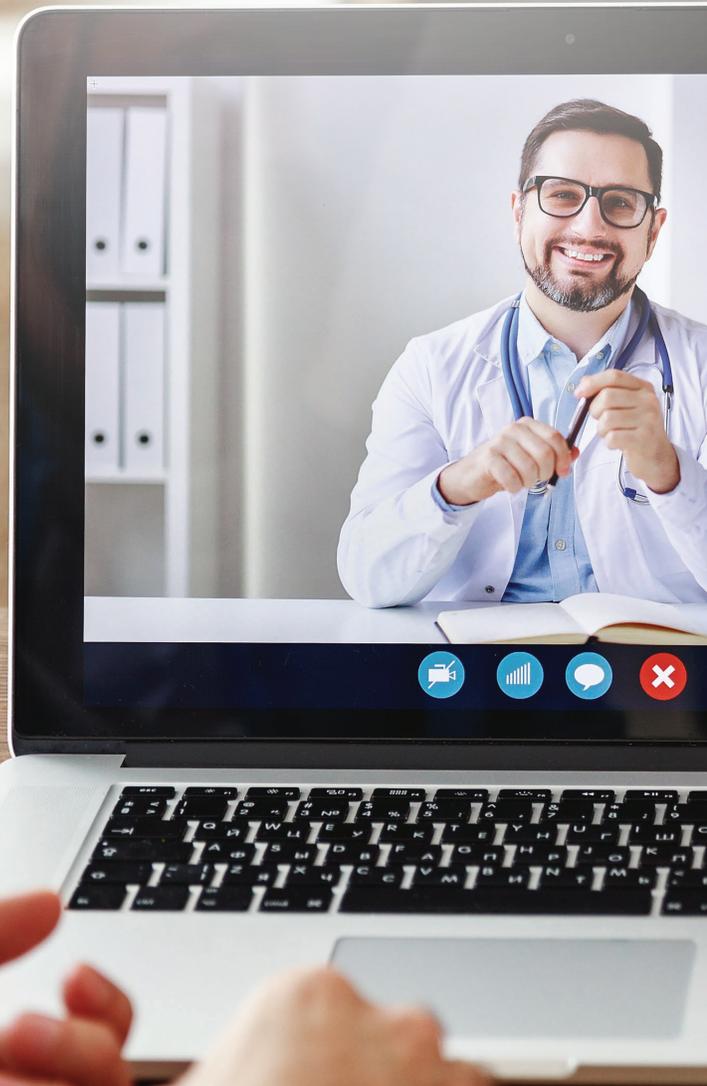
- In FY20, CCI concluded the LED implementation at the Boston VA.
- CCI has completed the advisory council report on the initiative.
- In October 2019, Christine Eickhoff, health system specialist for OCE, and Dr. Yelena Bogdanova, lead of the VA Boston Healthcare System's TBI clinic (pictured at right), presented on the initiative at the VHA Innovation Experience (iEX) event in Washington, D.C.

➤ **SGB (stellate ganglion block):** A successful clinical demonstration project supported by CCI and led by VA Long Beach Healthcare System is expected to expand the use of a treatment that can help Veterans who have been diagnosed with PTSD.



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**During COVID-19, VA clinicians monitored Veterans' progress with LED treatments virtually.**



Since the demonstration's inception in September 2017, clinical staff members at VA Long Beach have treated more than 120 Veterans who have PTSD symptoms with an injection of an anesthetic to a bundle of nerves, called the stellate ganglion, at the base of the patient's neck. Many Veterans experienced immediate relief after the procedure, and some Veterans benefitted from an additional injection. More than 185 treatments have been successfully completed with no adverse events. The treatment, called stellate ganglion block (SGB), is being used increasingly to treat Veterans with PTSD at other VA facilities and that trend is expected to continue as more anesthesiologists are trained on how to administer the treatment, more evidence about SGB's effectiveness becomes available, and the CCI team shares what it has learned in terms of best practices.

SGB is not considered an established, first-line treatment for PTSD; however, there is **growing evidence** that SGB may help alleviate PTSD symptoms such as anxiety and feeling hyperalert. SGB appears to calm the "fight or flight" feeling many Veterans experience. It is not known exactly how SGB works. According to Drs. Michael T. Alkire and Christopher Reist at the Long Beach VAMC, SGB likely affects the parts of the brain that manage anxiety, which results in people feeling less tense and hyperalert.

## OCE Partnerships, CCI Innovations, and Suicide Prevention

Veteran suicide prevention is VA Secretary Robert Wilkie's **top clinical priority for VA**, and VA implements suicide prevention strategies across the enterprise as part of its **National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide**.

OCE includes suicide prevention strategies, Veteran suicide risk awareness initiatives, and suicide prevention information for health care providers in all of its partnership agreements; CCI, meanwhile, upholds suicide prevention as one of its **four main focus areas**.

In OCE's partnership agreements, the team incorporates suicide prevention strategies such as:

- Providing information to Veterans, their spouses, caregivers, and families about suicide risk factors to increase health literacy around this issue;
- Sharing training and educational resources on the **Veteran Crisis Line** and the **PsychArmor Institute S.A.V.E. training**;
- Encouraging external partnership staff and affiliates to complete VHA-provided suicide awareness and prevention training.





## Featured Articles

Throughout this fiscal year, the OCE and CCI team consistently promoted the good news, updates, and activities associated with partnerships and innovations. The following 10 articles highlight topics such as the resources community partnerships—facilitated by OCE—have brought to Veterans; uplifting stories from VA medical centers across the country whose partnerships focus on the SDOH, a cornerstone of OCE and CCI’s work; how the Community Partnership Challenge theme this year (social determinants of health) is a thread that runs through partnerships and offices throughout VA and VHA; and a first-person account from a Veteran who has experienced symptom relief from a CCI innovation, just to name a few.

These articles are published to the OCE and CCI team’s online “home base”: [va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships), but have also seen placement on Vantage Point, VA’s main blog (see call-out box/sidebar on page 43 and in other publications highlighted on page 44).

### **Annual Community Partnership Challenge shines spotlight on organizations that help Veterans**

*Published to [OCE website](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships) July 24, 2020*

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) provides health care and services to more than 9 million Veterans, but it also relies on the generosity of partners who share their resources to serve Veterans.

Every year, the VHA Community Partnership Challenge highlights the most impactful of these nonmonetary community partnerships with nongovernmental organizations. A panel of judges reviews dozens of submissions each year to make this determination. The national contest is the signature event of VHA’s Office of Community Engagement (OCE) and aims to honor the work of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers and program office employees who have developed these partnerships. All partnerships help VHA serve more Veterans by augmenting the services VA is able to provide.

Ms. Lelia Jackson, who started the contest in 2014, said partnerships were occurring “in the field” at the community level, but not nationally. She credits the visionary leadership of the late Dr. Bob Jesse, who served as principal deputy under secretary for health, and Dr. Jennifer Lee, former special assistant to the principal deputy under secretary for health for health partnerships, for establishing strategic partnerships for VHA at the national level.

**“Dr. Lee believed if you get people motivated and competitive around showing off their partnerships, that might be a way to find out what’s out there, while also spotlighting the importance of community partnerships.”**

— Lelia Jackson, Senior Strategist, VHA's Office of the Chief of Staff

Ms. Jackson, now senior strategist with VHA’s Office of the Chief of Staff, said the first challenge “was incredible. It was very well represented across the whole Veterans Health Administration.” She recalls partnerships that centered on critical needs such as feeding underserved and homeless Veterans—which is still an effort many partnerships are focused on today. There were also unique ideas, such as a partnership with an airline so that Veterans with shrapnel in their bodies could get through airport screenings more easily, or “how to make the friendly skies friendly for people with disabilities,” she said.

From there, each year’s contest provided new lessons learned, contributing to VHA’s ability to provide tools and best practices on how to form partnerships. Ms. Jackson helped stand up OCE, the VHA program office which facilitates and provides expertise in support of VHA nonmonetary partnerships at the local, regional, and national level.

“We’re always trying to come up with innovative ways to meet the needs of Veterans, and you can’t be everywhere. While our budget might seem big, it still can’t meet every need. Our community partners have helped us do things we have never been able to do before. As an example, VA does not specialize in fly fishing,” Ms. Jackson explained of a partnership that contributes to Veterans’ whole health and mental health.

Ms. Jackson has seen partnerships grow, and through the vetting process, led by VA’s Office of General Counsel, even lead to legislation that allowed VA to close a gap in its services.

The Challenge is one more way to showcase the ingenuity and innovation that takes place within organizations every day in the field, she said. “We’ve probably just scratched the surface, there’s so much richness out there.”

The theme of the 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge is the social determinants of health (SDOH), which are the conditions in the environments where Veterans live, learn, play, worship, and age. Positive SDOH, such as access to education, employment, food security, housing, spiritual support, and transportation, make life and health better for Veterans.

“Partnerships are an important component of VHA care that can address needs across all social determinants of health. Many Veterans need support in those areas now, during the coronavirus pandemic especially,” said Dr. Tracy L. Weistreich, OCE nurse executive. “The field-based employees know what the Veterans in their community need and are creative in partnering to achieve optimal outcomes. We lift up these best practices to support adoption across the entire VHA system.”



The winners of the 2020 contest are expected to be announced this summer.

The top three winners receive:

- Recognition in a ceremony by the under secretary for health/executive in charge;
- Inclusion in a ceremonial video clip to be shared and seen VA-wide;
- A feature on the OCE website;
- A feature story on Vantage Point, VA’s official blog;
- An award for the VA facility from the VA secretary and the VHA under secretary for health.

For more information on OCE’s work or to contact OCE for partnership opportunities, please visit: [va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships).

## Community Partnership Challenge series: How one Veteran Community Partnership supports a critical social determinant of health

*Published to [OCE website](#) March 4, 2020*

*This is the first in a series of articles about how various VA and VHA offices, initiatives, and programs support social determinants of health—the theme of the VHA 2020 Community Partnership Challenge.*

The Hampton Roads Veteran Community Partnership (VCP) has hosted events and trainings since 2008 that aim to educate Veterans, community members, and health care professionals on topics relevant to Veterans' well-being. Those efforts are in keeping with the focus of VHA's 2020 Community Partnership Challenge because education is one of the social determinants of health (SDOH)—this year's Challenge theme.

The Challenge is **an annual contest hosted by VHA's Office of Community Engagement (OCE)** that highlights nonmonetary, community-level partnerships between VHA and nongovernmental organizations that serve Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. SDOH are conditions in the environments in which Veterans live, learn, work, play, worship, and age. Other SDOH include: employment, food security, housing, spiritual support, and transportation. When Veterans have access to positive SDOH such as these, they lead healthier lives.

"Positive SDOH decrease suicide risk, too, so Veterans' access to them is critical," said Dr. Tracy L. Weistreich, nurse executive for OCE. "A strong network of social support is another SDOH, and the community's involvement in the activities of this VCP offers that resource to Veterans."

The Hampton Roads VCP has a history of providing education on a broad range of topics for the Veterans in its community. This Virginia-based coalition offers: information on hospice care, education on how to enroll for benefits at the Veterans Administration (VA), trainings for social workers on Veteran suicide prevention, information sessions for Veteran caregivers about Alzheimer's' disease, and much more.



"We educate Veterans on everything that deals with Veterans," said Mary Dorss, community liaison for Freda H. Gordon Hospice & Palliative Care, one of the health care agencies working as part of this VCP. "That's one of the unique things about our committee."

Education is critical to the well-being of those in the Hampton Roads VCP community, explained Yvonne Bailey, a social worker at the Hampton VA Medical Center (HVAMC) who works on the VCP.

“You’d be amazed how many people in this area do not know how to apply for their VA benefits,” she elaborated. “When we started in 2008, the internet within VA wasn’t as savvy – we’d go out into the community.”

Comprising the Hampton Roads coalition are program representatives from HVAMC and other community health providers and agencies as well as Veterans and their caregivers. Hampton Roads is the very embodiment of a VCP: these coalitions bring community entities together to foster Veterans’ access to care and supportive services at VA and beyond. Any one VCP in the United States—there are 41 as of December 2019—is part of the [national VCP initiative](#), a joint project of the Veteran’s Health Administration’s (VHA’s) Offices of Geriatrics and Extended Care, Rural Health, and Caregiver Support, and OCE.

To reach its audience of Veterans, community members, and health care professionals, the VCP is always working to expand its network and create compelling events.

“We try to target folks who are touchpoint for Veterans,” said Ms. Dorss. The VCP creates flyers and a newsletter and has compiled a mailing list to reach these target individuals so that they can invite their networks to the VCP’s educational events. Often, representatives from local age-related groups, universities, and university geriatric social work departments attend or collaborate. Each year the VCP has hosted a one-day conference focused on education around palliative care and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In January, the VCP held an educational event on suicide prevention. A representative from the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention attended to educate Veterans, community members, and social workers about ways to assess suicide risk in Veteran communities and support prevention efforts.

In November, the VCP will hold a training event around the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War to educate attendees about the needs that Veterans of that war may have, such as support related to certain physical disabilities such as amputations, care for psychological issues such as PTSD, and aging-related needs such as home health care or hospice care.

Ms. Bailey and Ms. Dorss said that they take pride in the work their VCP does because the education extends to the entire community. In turn, it’s not only Veterans, but also their caregivers and loved ones, who experience the benefits of this SDOH.

“Alzheimer’s, PTSD, cancer, these are not one-person diseases, they affect a whole community,” said Ms. Bailey.

“Even though VCP is a VA initiative, the whole idea behind it is to really open it up to the community and people not affiliated with VA,” Mrs. Dorss said. “We’re really looking to break down some of those barriers and improve communications between VA, community organizations, and everyday individuals.”

To read more about what other VCPs throughout the country are doing for Veterans, please visit: [va.gov/healthpartnerships/vcp.asp](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships/vcp.asp).



## Community Partnership Challenge series: How the Veterans Experience Office and the Community Veteran Engagement Board initiative supports the social determinants of health

*Published to [OCE website](#) April 6, 2020*

*This is the second in a series of articles about how various VA and VHA offices, initiatives, and programs support social determinants of health—the theme of the VHA 2020 Community Partnership Challenge.*

The Veterans Experience Office (VEO) and its Veterans, Family, and Community Engagement (VFCE) Directorate works with VEO's Community Veteran Engagement Board (CVEB) initiative to provide services in support of Veterans' employment, transportation, food security, and more. These efforts are in keeping with the focus of VHA's 2020 Community Partnership Challenge theme: the social determinants of health (SDOH). CVEBs are situated in communities across the nation—there are currently 161—and are community groups comprising Veterans, Veteran advocates, Veteran-serving organizations, and civic leaders who collaborate to meet specific needs in their community. CVEBs' efforts focus on a diversity of Veteran needs and support many SDOH.

“Because of the diversity and flexibility of CVEBs, they are able to support social determinants of health that best meet the needs of Veterans in the local community they serve,” said Jim Wartski, VFCE's executive director.

For example, Mr. Wartski explained, some CVEBs have helped put programs in place to provide free bus passes to assist Veterans with their transportation needs. Others have established **Veterans treatment court** programs to help Veterans involved in the legal system experience positive outcomes. Each CVEB is unique and serves a variety of different needs. It is the community that comes together to work toward each CVEB's goals.

VFCE, in cooperation with national nonprofit organizations, identified key areas for CVEBs to monitor in their communities to better support Veterans' well-being. Some of those areas include homelessness, employment, and education—all are focus areas of this year's Community Partnership Challenge, and are evidence that individuals across VA recognize how important SDOH are for Veterans' quality of life.

“The social determinants of health encompass so many areas impacting the livelihood of Veterans and their families,” said Mr. Wartski. “Many CVEBs are the catalyst for bringing community partners together to address the issues affecting the social determinants of health.”

VEO's mission is to enable VA to be the leading customer service organization in government, so that Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors choose VA. The nationwide reach of CVEBs, and these groups' ability to target efforts specifically on the needs of their communities, enables them to provide an inimitable customer experience and support of SDOH.

The Community Partnership Challenge is **an annual contest hosted by OCE** that highlights nonmonetary, community-level partnerships between VHA and nongovernmental organizations that serve Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. SDOH, this year's Challenge theme, are conditions in the environments in which Veterans live, learn, work, play, worship, and age. The SDOH that are the focus of this year's Challenge are: employment, food security, housing, spiritual support, and transportation. When Veterans have access to positive SDOH such as these, they lead healthier lives.

For more information about CVEBs, please visit: [va.gov/ve/engagement/communityBoards.asp](https://va.gov/ve/engagement/communityBoards.asp)

## Community Partnership Challenge series: How Medical-Legal Partnerships can improve social determinants of health

*Published to [OCE website](#) April 9, 2020*

*This is the third in a series of articles about how various VA and VHA offices, initiatives, and programs support social determinants of health—the theme of the VHA 2020 Community Partnership Challenge.*

VA Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLPs) combine health care intervention with legal resources to improve positive outcomes for Veterans. In this collaborative effort, legal providers are co-located with VA health care teams to address unmet legal needs such as child custody, guardianship or elder law, and landlord-tenant disputes.

Through MLPs, Veterans' access to positive social determinants of health—such as housing, transportation, and education about VA services—can be supported. Social determinants of health (SDOH) are conditions in the environments in which Veterans live, learn, work, play, worship, and age.

Fanita Jackson-Norman, a member of VA's MLP Taskforce, provided a few examples of how MLPs can assist Veterans. These include:



- Veterans receiving help with avoiding eviction, by attorneys utilizing tenant protection laws, so that Veterans have access to safe and stable housing.
- Veterans working with an attorney on drivers' license suspension or revocation in order to have transportation and a valid address to use to get to employment and/or obtain any public benefits.
- Veterans requesting assistance with military discharge upgrades, which can allow access to VA health care and other benefits.

In a study published in **November 2019 in the Journal of General Internal Medicine**, legal problems (considered a negative SDOH) significantly increased the odds of Veterans' suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, even after adjusting for mental health diagnoses. The study concluded that negative SDOH are as relevant as medical factors (such as depression) for suicide prevention and treatment.

Positive SDOH such as housing, transportation, and employment, are critical to Veterans' health and thus are also the theme of this year's VHA Community Partnership Challenge, **an annual contest hosted by VHA's Office of Community Engagement (OCE)** that highlights nonmonetary, community-level partnerships between VHA and nongovernmental organizations that serve Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. The SDOH that are the focus of this year's Challenge are: employment, food security, housing, spiritual support, and transportation. When Veterans have access to positive SDOH such as these, they lead healthier lives.

Ms. Jackson-Norman also pointed to a **2017 article in the Health Affairs Journal** that studied four VA Medical-Legal Partnership sites, which concluded: "Veterans who received more partnership services showed greater improvement in housing and mental health than those who received fewer services, and those who achieved their predefined legal goals showed greater improvements in housing status and community integration than those who did not."

Ms. Jackson-Norman also spoke to the importance of the collaborative aspect of MLPs.

"If you think of the dollar value that pro-bono attorneys and legal organizations are donating into VA medical centers each year, these are critical resources that would not have been provided otherwise," she said.

For more on how MLPs help Veterans, please visit: <https://medical-legalpartnership.org/partnerships/>.

For more information on OCE's work or to contact OCE for partnership opportunities, please visit: [va.gov/healthpartnerships/](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships/).

# Community Partnership Challenge series: How initiatives within the Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation promote patient-centered care for Veterans across the social determinants of health

Published to the [OCE website](#) May 7, 2020

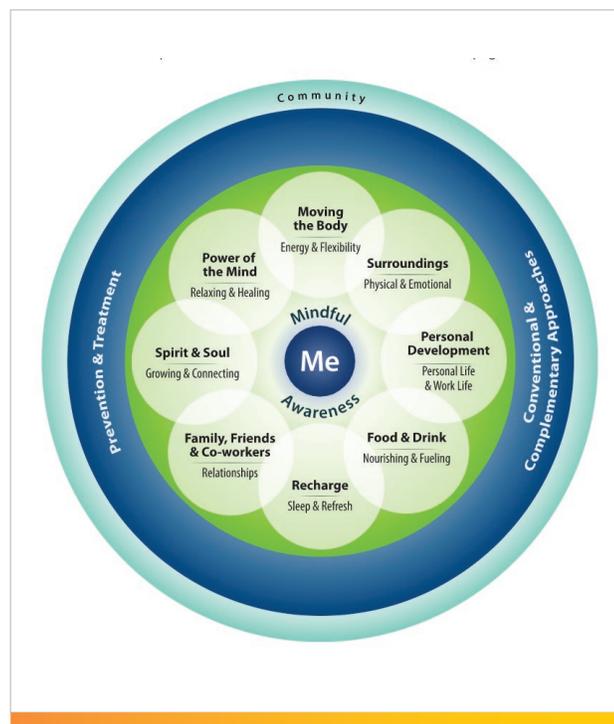
*This is the fourth in a series of articles about how various VA and VHA offices, initiatives, and programs support social determinants of health—the theme of the 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge.*

The overarching mission of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCC&CT) is to support and advance the concept of “Whole Health.” Whole Health is an approach to health care that empowers and equips people to take charge of their health and well-being. A Whole Health approach shifts the health care system away from a primary focus on disease management to one that emphasizes a more proactive and comprehensive view of a person’s health and well-being.

Many of the other factors that impact a person’s well-being are collectively known as the social determinants of health (SDOH). These are conditions in the environments in which Veterans live, learn, play, worship, and age. Six of these conditions are the theme of the 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge, led by VHA’s Office of Community Engagement (OCE): Employment, food security, housing, spiritual support, education, and transportation. When Veterans have access to positive SDOH such as these, they lead healthier lives.

The Whole Health model involves the consideration of many SDOH. Through its implementation of the model into Veterans’ health care, as well as its educational programming around Whole Health, OPCC&CT is helping Veterans access services to support their needs across SDOH.

Dr. Michelle Dorsey, senior clinical advisor for OPCC&CT and chief judge of this year’s Community Partnership Challenge, and Dr. Ben Kligler, acting executive director of OPCC&CT, shared the office’s “**Circle of Health**,” which illustrates the connections between a person’s health and other aspects of their life. There are eight categories in the Circle of Health that can affect the individual at the center of the circle:



- Moving the body: Energy and flexibility
- Surroundings: Physical and emotional
- Personal development: Personal life and work life
- Food and drink: Nourishing and fueling
- Recharge: Sleep and refresh
- Family, friends, and co-workers: Relationships
- Spirit and soul: Growing and connecting
- Power of the mind: Relaxing and healing

The categories within the Circle of Health overlap with many of the SDOH that are the focus of OCE's Challenge this year. For example, Dr. Kligler said, OPCC&CT helps connect Veterans within the VA health care system with chaplains for spiritual support. Dr. Dorsey explained that her office has been including the expertise and resources of the Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA) into its work, so that Veterans may have support for their employment needs—[VBA](#) offers many professional opportunities to Veterans.

From an educational perspective, OPCC&CT staff members introduce Veterans to Whole Health concepts in various settings, said Dr. Kligler. Veterans can find online Whole Health educational sessions on OPCC&CT's [website](#). In-person sessions and peer-led groups are offered by individual VA facilities, such as a group called "Introduction to Whole Health," which is a one- to two-hour long session led by a trained facilitator or staff member.

"They get introduced to the idea of what's different about Whole Health," Dr. Kligler explained. "If they're interested in going from there, [Veterans can attend] 'Taking Charge of My Life and Health' courses."

In those courses, he said, the core curriculum is eight-to-nine weeks of meetings where Veterans will discuss the Circle of Health and how they can be empowered to introduce each category into their lives.

"A lot of times these happen face-to-face, but they're also happening via Telehealth," Dr. Kligler said. "It's meant to be extremely flexible." Some Veterans have these conversations with a staff member one-on-one, but the peer groups offer an opportunity for Veterans to experience social engagement and support as well.

VA or VHA staff can also sign up for three-day trainings that teach them how to facilitate these groups. Dr. Kligler said that OPCC&CT staff members are also training Veterans to lead the groups. This is beneficial for Veterans' personal development.

Dr. Dorsey said that these groups are positive for all involved: "It's not just benefitting the Veterans, it really benefits all of us," she said, of how the groups are beneficial for staff members, too.

“I feel like that is going to be a way to help reduce burnout and turnover.” Last year, OPCC&CT reached 10,000 staff members with its educational programs.

“We were very excited to be diving into this work,” said Dr. Dorsey of the SDOH. “The good news is there are many people working in this space, and it’s been great to work with folks across the agency who are working on this issue.”

She also explained how important partnerships, such as those that will be recognized by OCE’s Community Partnership Challenge, are for Veterans’ health and well-being.

“As the Community Partnership Challenge moves forward and the winning community groups get selected and featured, we’re going to include those best practices into our educational [programming]” Dr. Dorsey said. “VA cannot do these things on its own. We need to leverage our community partners.”

For more on Whole Health and how to get involved, please visit: [va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/index.asp](https://va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/index.asp). For more information on OCE’s work or to contact OCE for partnership opportunities, please visit: [va.gov/healthpartnerships/](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships/).

## Community Partnership Challenge series: How Veterans Transportation Service prevents missed medical appointments, leading to better health outcomes for Veterans

*Published to [OCE website](#) June 18, 2020*

*This is the fifth in a series of articles about how various VA and VHA offices, initiatives, and programs support social determinants of health—the theme of the 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge.*

Veterans Transportation Service (VTS), which provides free door-to-door travel for Veterans to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and authorized non-VA health care facilities for medical care, has resulted in better health outcomes for patients, according to a 2018 research study. The reason: Fewer missed medical appointments.

The study, conducted by The MITRE Corporation, found that VA patients who lack transportation were more likely to: visit an emergency department (ED); be admitted to inpatient status from the ED; exhibit higher readmission rates and pain scores; be diagnosed with suicidal ideations, attempted suicide, or intentional self-harm; have lower five-year survival rates for lung cancer and prostate cancer; and more. The study found that more than 250,000 patients who canceled at least one VA appointment in 2017 cited transportation problems as the reason.

Positive social determinants of health (SDOH), such as access to transportation, are so critical to Veterans’ well-being that they are the theme of the [Veterans Health Administration \(VHA\) Community](#)

**Partnership Challenge**, an annual contest hosted by VHA's Office of Community Engagement (OCE). SDOH are conditions in the environments where Veterans live, learn, play, worship, and age.

Marc Chevalier, field operations manager for the Veterans Transportation Program, which oversees VTS, saw first-hand how a lack of transportation could have damaging effects on Veterans. Motivated to work in mental health services at VA because of the high rate of patient suicide and suicide attempts, the licensed clinical social worker said mental health issues were made worse by Veterans' family problems and a lack of access to regular medical care. Transportation to appointments was especially a problem for Veterans who had lost their family's support, he said.

"Being able to have that routine interaction with the therapist is critical, particularly for patients who are dealing with major depressive disorder or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)," he said.

For patients in rural areas, where transportation options are fewer, Veterans who are experiencing a mental health crisis might be transported to a VA medical center by local law enforcement, and possibly in handcuffs. "That does not help their mental health condition any," he said. "Once that happens, Veterans tend not to call for help again."



According to the study, patients who were diagnosed with intentional self-harm, attempted suicide, or suicidal ideations who used VTS at least once reduced their appointment cancellation rates by 20%.

With VHA recognizing that lack of transportation was a barrier to care, Mr. Chevalier was invited to serve on a work group that led to the creation of VTS in 2010, and he piloted one of the first VTS programs at VA Muskogee.

Prior to that, Mr. Chevalier said, VA had been transporting Veterans for 25-30 years, "but typically it was very haphazard, unregulated and mostly in the form of shuttles," which were problematic because Veterans still needed transportation to a pick-up location, and the shuttle vans were restricted to ambulatory patients.

VTS provides funding to participating VA medical centers for a mobility manager, dispatcher, drivers, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant wheelchair, stretcher, and ambulance vehicles.

"We cover large areas, especially in rural states, such as Montana with one VA medical center in the whole state and with vehicles stationed at all of the VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinics—some as far as 238 miles one way from the medical center" he said. "VTS has collaborated between participating sites to transport Veterans as far as across four states (Ohio to Alabama)."

VTS, which currently operates in 120 VA medical centers, is expanding by adding approximately 10-20 sites by the end of FY21, said Mr. Chevalier. As a result of a VHA directive, all VA medical centers will offer VTS by the end of FY22.

For more information on VTS, please visit:

[va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/veterans\\_transportation\\_service.asp](https://va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/veterans_transportation_service.asp)

For more information on OCE's work or to contact OCE for partnership opportunities, please visit:

[va.gov/healthpartnerships/](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships/).

## Community Partnership Challenge series: How Veterans Hub and VHA's Office of Health Equity Address Social Determinants of Health

*Published to [OCE website](#) July 9, 2020*

***This is the sixth in a series of articles about how various VA and VHA offices, initiatives, and programs support social determinants of health—the theme of the 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge.***

Veterans Hub, part of the 100 Million Healthier Lives movement, is on a mission to help 20 million Veterans live healthier lives in 2020 by focusing on improving their social determinants of health (SDOH). The SDOH are conditions in environments where Veterans live, learn, play, worship, and age.

Veterans Hub, led by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA)'s Office of Community Engagement (OCE), is working to accomplish this mission through unprecedented collaboration with more than 60 individuals and organizations within VHA and in other government and community organizations. **VHA's Office of Health Equity (OHE)** is just one example of a VA program office that is working to bring more SDOH-related health-focused services to Veterans.

When Veterans have access to critical needs such as transportation, employment, health care, and fresh, healthy foods, they have better health outcomes. Social factors like these are so critical to Veteran health that they are the theme of 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge, an annual contest hosted by OCE that highlights nonmonetary, community-level partnerships between VHA and nongovernmental organizations that serve Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

Dr. Ernest Moy, executive director of OHE and a health services researcher and internal medicine doctor who has spent most of his career studying health care equity, said VHA is well-positioned to help Veterans access positive SDOH. Clinical providers outside VHA can provide medical advice and medications, but they typically cannot address patients' housing, food security, or financial issues that can hamper their care.

Within VHA, he said, there are not significant financial barriers to health care, plus VHA is part of the larger VA system that can address SDOH deficits through initiatives such as those to eliminate homelessness, VA home loans to provide affordable mortgages, food banks that are located within VA medical centers, the GI Bill, which provides education benefits to Veterans that can lead to good paying jobs, and access to employment opportunities for Veterans.

OHE supported the development of the Assessing Circumstances Offering Resources for Need (ACORN) social needs screener used in the VA New England Healthcare System to identify any SDOH deficits that patients face and local-level resources that can help alleviate those issues.

One SDOH that comes up frequently is social isolation, according to Dr. Moy. It is especially a concern for older Veterans who are living alone and away from family and friends.

“It can have a big impact on their lives. They’re less compliant with their medications and instructions, and eventually, this can lead to them having to move into a nursing home,” said Dr. Moy.

Now with the coronavirus pandemic impacting everyday life, “how you are living is going to strongly affect the likelihood that you will contract the disease,” he added. With that in mind, OHE is now promoting use of a COVID-19 special risk screener so health care providers can understand their patients’ social circumstances, which can affect their risk for infection. For example, Veterans are asked if they leave home to go to work or to get groceries, whether they use public transportation, how many people they live with, and whether the residence is a single-family home versus an apartment building, where multiple people are touching common surfaces such as door handles and elevator buttons.

As the screening gets built in to VA’s computerized patient record system, retention of this data could make a difference in the lives of Veterans should COVID-19 cases die down over the summer and pick up again in the fall, Dr. Moy said.

“We can do more proactive counseling by knowing who’s at high risk,” said Dr. Moy. For instance, if someone who was screened in the spring was found to have social risks, but didn’t contract COVID-19, that Veteran would be at the top of a list to call back in the fall as a reminder that they should be particularly watchful and observant, he said.

Dr. Moy has been active in the Veterans Hub, providing the unique perspective and resources related to health equity across the populations of Veterans. He said the work his office does in collaboration with the VA New England Healthcare System leads to connecting Veterans with services, relying on social workers who have access to resources outside VA. Once resources have been identified, OHE also submits them to the [National Resource Directory](#), a partnership between the U.S. Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, which Veterans and service members can access online.

For more information on OCE’s work or to contact OCE for partnership opportunities, please visit: [va.gov/healthpartnerships/](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships/).

## VHA's partnership with American College of Emergency Physicians leads to benefits for Veterans requiring emergency care

*Published to [OCE website](#) December 2, 2019*

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), as the largest integrated health care system in the United States, offers many services and programs to Veterans with specific needs. Veterans who utilize the VHA health care system are more likely than the general population to report poor physical and mental health and to have chronic health conditions, such as traumatic brain injury (TBI), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or anxiety or depression. VHA provides Veterans with the best care to serve their specific needs, including when Veterans visit VHA emergency departments (EDs). Those Veterans who visit non-VHA EDs need to receive the best care, too.

If a Veteran visits a non-VHA ED because he or she has sustained a wound, for example, these community-based, non-VHA ED providers must have awareness of, and education around, how to care for that person given his or her Veteran-specific health conditions. To achieve this, VHA partnered with the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) in August 2018 to educate community ED providers about Veteran-specific needs, services, and care, as well as to enhance recruitment efforts to bring more ED professionals to work in VHA medical facilities. VHA and ACEP have already delivered on three identified partnership goals while working together.

The goals of the partnership include: to educate non-VHA community ED providers on Veteran benefits and VHA resources (such as the Veterans Crisis Line) so that they can speak to Veterans about available options; to provide non-VHA medical professionals with education around Veteran-centered and Veteran-specific care; and to place more qualified emergency medicine professionals in VHA. This VHA-ACEP partnership will disseminate ED best practices by applying the knowledge of both organizations to services that serve Veterans' health.

This partnership, managed by VHA's Office of Specialty Care Services and facilitated by VHA's Office of Community Engagement (OCE), has increased ED providers' ability to offer Veteran-centered emergency care. Emergency care refers to hospital services that must be provided immediately to prevent the death or serious impairment to the health of the patient.



Dr. Chad Kessler, national program director for emergency care at VA, who manages this partnership through Specialty Care Services, pointed out that this partnership has been successful in myriad ways:

- Now, more resources are available (such as canes and walkers for geriatric patients) in EDs;
- VHA has been able to learn about and implement technology made available by ACEP, such as its Clinical Emergency Department Registry, its Emergency Department Information Exchange, and its Emergency Department Information System;
- Veterans' access to VHA's tele-urgent care program will continue to expand. Through that program, Veterans can go to outpatient care centers to speak through an iPad to ED providers about low-level acute needs, such as flu symptoms.

Josh Geiger, executive officer for emergency care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and a United States Marine Corps Veteran, called the tele-urgent care program "game-changing in the world of emergency medicine." Thanks to this collaboration, VHA's EDs are able to achieve the "benchmark" standard and level of quality set in the industry by ACEP, Dr. Kessler said.

ACEP, a nonprofit corporation, was founded in 1968 and its mission is founded on the idea that quality emergency care is a fundamental individual right. The organization is dedicated to providing education to Veterans and the health care professionals who treat Veterans. Dr. Kessler described ACEP as a leader in emergency medicine, saying that ACEP helped define the field.

"ACEP has been integral to growing emergency department care within VHA," said Dr. Kessler.

VHA EDs are already on the front lines of providing exceptional care to Veteran populations, as demonstrated by the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center ED's recent Level 1 Geriatric ED accreditation from ACEP for its Geriatric Emergency Room Innovations for Veterans (GERI-VET) program.

The Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center ED is a standout example of the kind of high-quality ED this partnership can help support and produce. It achieved ACEP's highest level of accreditation (Level 1) for its GERI-VET program for geriatric Veterans. The Cleveland facility is the first VA ED to receive such recognition, according to Dr. Jill Huded, acute care geriatrician at the facility. The GERI-VET program focuses on a targeted population of Veterans: geriatric (ages 65 and older) patients, who may have additional physical, psychological, and social needs when they visit an ED, **such as heart disease, arthritis, or cancer**. At the Cleveland ED, intermediate care technicians (ICTs) help provide care to these Veterans. ICTs are military-trained medics and corpsman who are Veterans themselves and are able to offer a level of connection with Veteran patients that enhances the patient-provider experience.

“The Cleveland ED offers a global, whole-health approach to care that is geriatric-friendly,” said Dr. Kessler. “It allows for excellent care and outcomes for geriatric Veterans.”

Now, ICTs from the Cleveland VA are training and educating providers at other facilities about this high-quality, specific care for older Veterans. This kind of training and education is mirrored in the goals and outcomes of the VHA-ACEP partnership.

VHA ED providers offer high-quality care to Veteran patients and this partnership offers non-VHA, community providers the chance to learn from VHA and ACEP together; when VHA and nongovernmental partners come together in this way, their resources combine to bring Veterans even better service.

“The care coordination offered by VHA EDs is second-to-none,” said Mr. Geiger. “There’s a sense of camaraderie in VHA EDs; I can say something to other Veterans in the VHA waiting room and feel understood.”

Dr. Tracy Weistreich, nurse executive for OCE, said that community ED providers and Veterans alike will continue to experience positive outcomes from this partnership.

“When a Veteran comes to a VHA emergency room, they can rest assured that providers there will bear in mind their coexisting health-related needs in addition to emergency care,” she said. “Now, through this partnership, VHA can spread that knowledge to other emergency departments and we know that Veterans, no matter where they receive care, will benefit.”

To learn more about OCE and how it brings effective partnerships to life throughout VHA, visit: [va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships).

To learn more about ACEP’s work, visit: [acep.org](https://acep.org).



## **Americans for the Arts and VHA focus on Veterans’ wellness through the Whole Health System**

*Published to [OCE website](#) November 25, 2019*

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and Americans for the Arts (AFTA) are continuing their work together to increase Veterans’ access to the arts and humanities and enhance services for them and their families. This expansion of an existing partnership will provide more Veterans with the opportunity to experience how arts can benefit their health and well-being. It also supports the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA’s) implementation of the Whole Health System, a holistic approach to health care that empowers and equips people to take charge of their wellness.

To bring this partnership expansion to fruition, VHA’s Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCC&CT) will work with AFTA to create a formalized process by which VA facilities can

establish new, collaborative relationships with local arts partners. Over the past several years, more than 30 VA facilities have participated in efforts to bring the partnership's offerings to Veterans. Now, through this formalized process, these facilities can expand their offerings so that more Veterans can participate in arts and humanities programming at their local medical center or at community partner facilities. Local offerings could include one or more of several evidence-based arts and humanities modalities, including: cultural therapy, dance, origami, drumming, storytelling, music, art, and more.

The Whole Health System **centers around** "what matters" to a patient, such as arts well-being programs, not just "what is the matter" with a patient. Whole Health aims to focus on patients' goals and partnership between them and their health care teams over time, not only disease management. VA recognizes that Veterans need this type of health system; clinical encounters are only one part of the overall health care equation.

Since 2018, OPCC&CT has collaborated with AFTA, VA's Voluntary Service, and VHA's Recreation Therapy Service to coordinate workshops that educate VA staff about developing partnerships between VA and community arts and humanities organizations. The aim of these partnerships is to bring Veterans resources and tools that may enhance their health. OPCC&CT will plan another Arts and Humanities in Support of Greater Health and Well-Being Workshop in 2020, as well.

"Purposeful activity in the arts has a major benefit with Veterans we serve," said Donna Faraone, OPCC&CT's Field Implementation Team (FIT) lead.

Some of the benefits Veterans can experience by participating in art therapy are:

- An opportunity for reintegration into the community through participation in group art classes;
- A sense of comfort and relaxation from the endorphins – "feel-good chemicals" – produced by creating art;
- A chance to learn a new skill, occupy the mind, and express oneself; and/or:
- Decreased feelings of pain and increased healing; VA staff have stated that when Veterans participate in art therapy, they ask less frequently for pain medication and nurse assistance, leave health care facilities sooner, and get better faster.

OPCC&CT and AFTA will also attend and participate in at least one conference or workshop throughout fiscal year 2020 to support the growth of this partnership. For example, the partners will reveal lessons learned from previously held workshops at the 2020 Military in the Arts Summit. Throughout the year, the team will follow-up with an estimated 14 different VA medical centers to evaluate their process planning for the partnership. Sites may conduct meet-and-greets between key VA personnel and potential community arts partners.

"Through VA's Whole Health approach to care, each Veteran has the opportunity to be an active participant in their personal health planning process," said Ms. Faraone. "If VA can have an impact in

transforming the approach to health care to the Whole Health model, then maybe there's potential at some point to spread Whole Health practices to the community that does not receive health care from VA."

This and other partnerships established by VHA's Office of Community Engagement (OCE) support the administration's mission to honor America's Veterans by increasing their health and well-being.

- View a VHA video about how the arts enhance Veterans' health care at: [youtube.com/watch?v=h4uxrFuyBmQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4uxrFuyBmQ).
- To learn more about the role the arts play in Whole Health, please visit OPCC&CT's website at: [va.gov/wholehealth](https://va.gov/wholehealth).
- For more information on the partnership between OPCC&CT and Americans for the Arts, visit: <https://bit.ly/2obHavE>.
- For more information on OCE and its work on partnerships like this one, visit [va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships).

## **Veteran with TBI says LED treatment has significantly improved his sleep, activity levels, and well-being**

*Published to [OCE website](#) December 5, 2019*

Michael Sellars, a former U.S. Army field artillery officer, experienced multiple traumatic brain injury (TBI) events during his 32 years of military service. By 2018, he says his chronic TBI symptoms had grown so intrusive that he was sleeping only one or two hours at a time. He also was dissatisfied with how the standard medication for his symptoms made him feel.

"You do the best you can to live with it the best you can," Mr. Sellars says of his experience dealing with symptoms of TBI, including headaches and difficulty sleeping, which gradually worsened over time. He personally felt that the medications he was taking weren't the best choice for him among the **variety of treatment options available at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**. He wanted to explore other ways to treat his TBI symptoms.

Since he started a home-based course of treatment using light-emitting diode (LED) therapy equipment last year, Mr. Sellars has experienced a noticeable improvement in his overall well-being. "I sleep so much better. I'm much more likely to be active and engaged in doing things. In general, I feel better. It really has made a significant change to me, personally," he says.

The treatment that Mr. Sellars is receiving is part of a collaborative, three-year clinical demonstration project that is led by the VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHCS) LED TBI clinic and supported by CCI.

CCI's mission is to explore emerging therapies that are safe and ethical to enhance Veterans' physical and mental well-being when other treatments have not been successful. TBI is one of CCI's focus areas, along with suicide prevention, posttraumatic stress disorder, and chronic pain.

After being referred to and evaluated by VA Boston's clinicians, Mr. Sellers started wearing an LED headset for 25 minutes, three times a week, in the privacy and convenience of his home. The headset is affixed with LEDs, which do not generate heat. The process is painless and noninvasive, and the equipment is portable so that Veterans can still access the treatment if they travel.

**Research<sup>1</sup> on<sup>2</sup> LED<sup>3</sup>** therapy to date suggests that the treatment may help with symptoms associated with TBI — such as impaired mood, memory, or attention — and that it promotes healing at the cellular level, due in part to the specialized light's ability to increase blood flow. More than 100 Veterans have benefited so far from VABHCS's LED therapy offering, which is not part of the clinical research program.

Many of the Veterans treated in this clinical demonstration project have reported improvements in health factors that have persisted for years, such as sleep and mood issues.

One year after he started the treatment program, Mr. Sellars continues to use the LED equipment, which he calls "extremely relaxing," three times a week. He talks once per month by phone with his VA health care provider, who ensures that he is using the device properly, records his treatment activity, and determines if he needs any follow-ups with other providers.

Mr. Sellars says he highly recommends that other Veterans give the technology a chance. He also advises that Veterans follow the prescriber's instructions, including using the device in quiet conditions.

"You can't sit in a room with several people or have the TV on," he says.

When asked about his overall experience with the LED treatment, Mr. Sellars says: "I'm solidly behind it. I hope it can be expanded because I think a lot of Veterans can benefit from it."

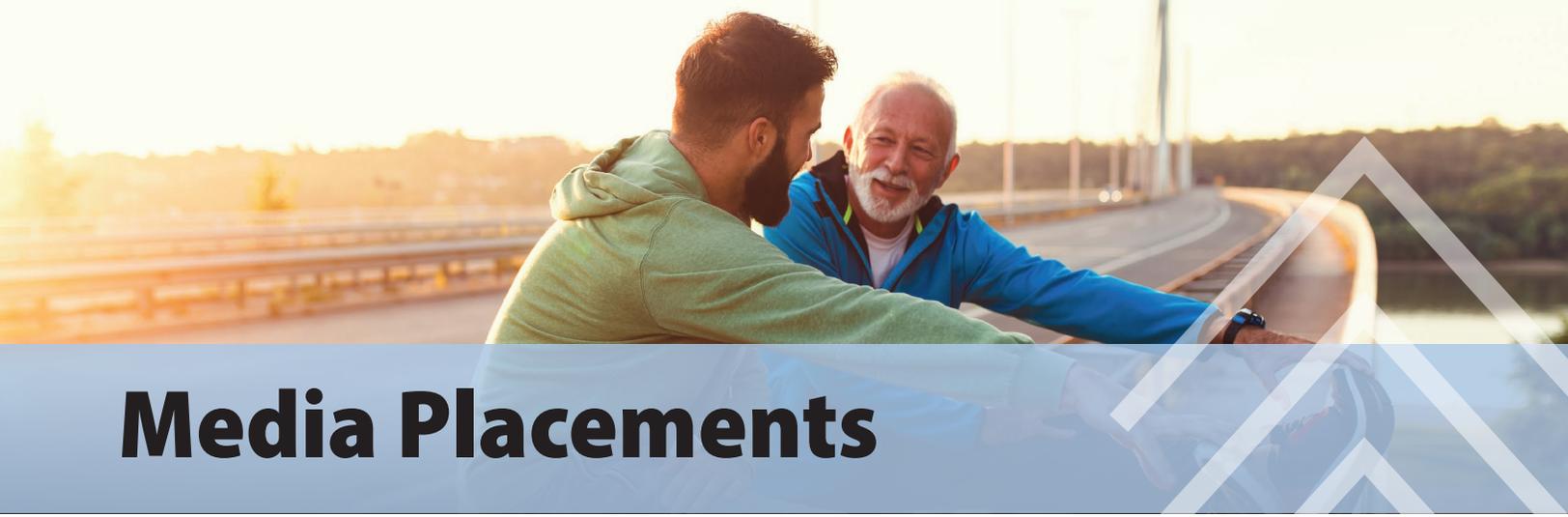
For the latest information on this and other innovative treatments, please visit: [va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/CCIMission.asp](https://va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/CCIMission.asp).

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<sup>1</sup>Quirk, B.J., Torbey, M., Buchmann, E., Verma, S., Whelan, H.T. (2012). Near-infrared photobiomodulation in an animal model of traumatic brain injury: improvements at the behavioral and biochemical levels. Department of Neurology, Medical College of Wisconsin. doi: 10.1089/pho.2012.3261.

<sup>2</sup>Hipskind, S.G., Grover, F.L. Jr., Fort, T.R., Helffenstein D., Burke, T.J., Quint, S.A., Bussiere, G., Stone, M., Hurtado, T. (2019). Pulsed Transcranial Red/Near-Infrared Light Therapy Using Light-Emitting Diodes Improves Cerebral Blood Flow and Cognitive Function in Veterans with Chronic Traumatic Brain Injury: A Case Series. Photobiomodul Photomed Laser Surg. doi: 10.1089/photob.2018.4489.

<sup>3</sup>Chao, LL. Improvements in Gulf War Illness Symptoms After Near-Infrared Transcranial and Intranasal Photobiomodulation: Two Case Reports. (2019). Mil Med. doi: 10.1093/milmed/usz037.



# Media Placements

OCE and CCI share good news stories through multiple channels such as VA and VHA social media; Vantage Point, VA's official blog; VA Insider, VA's staff-facing blog; OCE and CCI's SharePoint site; Dr. Beck's monthly letter to 10P staff; and the OCE website.

## VA / VHA social media

 **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** ✓  
17 hrs · 🌐

Operation Hero-Animal Bond helps match Veterans with animals to adopt. The human-animal bond is the mutually beneficial relationship between people and animals. Research shows Veterans benefit.



BLOGS.VA.GOV  
Veterans experience the joys of adopting pets - Vantage Point

 **Veterans Health** ✓ @VeteransHealth · Aug 29

VA has announced the winners of the 2020 Veterans Health Administration Community Partnership Challenge, recognizing VA facility partnerships with local community organizations that help Veterans and their families lead happier healthier lives.  
[va.gov/opa/pressrel/p...](#)



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 **Veterans Health** ✓ @VeteransHealth · 45m

VA is partnering with OnStar's emergency services to offer Veterans in crisis the opportunity to be transferred to VA's Veterans Crisis Line when they use the emergency services button in an OnStar-equipped vehicle or OnStar Guardian smartphone app.  
[va.gov/opa/pressrel/p...](#)



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 **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** ✓  
July 14 at 6:30 AM · 🌐

VA and MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger partner to support Veteran food security <https://bit.ly/2CuCDLY>



# Vantage Point

## OCE and CCI Vantage Point Features

This fiscal year, stories about OCE and CCI-supported work were featured on **Vantage Point**, VA's main blog that serves a public and Veteran audience. These four articles, the most widely read of OCE and CCI's Vantage Point-placed work this year, collectively received 15,000 views as of August 2020.

**Veterans experience hope and healing through partnerships**  
Collaboration helps Vets with OTH discharges



  Thursday, June 11, 2020 4:00 pm | Health | Vantage Point Contributor | 945 views

**Food pantries at VA facilities support Veteran whole health**  
Food insecurity is not only about grocery supplies



  Monday, June 15, 2020 10:07 am | Health | Vantage Point Contributor | 48 views

**Veterans benefit from job placement, mental health support**  
Vocational Rehabilitation Service promotes recovery



  Wednesday, May 20, 2020 10:00 am | Health | Vantage Point Contributor | 8k views

**Coping with COVID-19: help for Veterans with lung disease**  
Resources for Vets from the American Lung Association



  June 10, 2020 10:00 am | Coronavirus, Health, Top Stories | Vantage Point Contributor | 5 comments | 2k views

# OCE and CCI Newsletters

OCE and CCI's quarterly newsletter keeps readers up to date on how our team and our partners are making a positive difference in the lives of Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Here's a look back at every issue from 2020.

## February

- A new technology platform helps Veterans connect to resources and services
- The Mental Health Mobility Service Dog Benefit Initiative helps qualified Veterans with expenses for their service animals
- At-home LED therapy brings relief from TBI symptoms to Veterans' living rooms
- Partnerships throughout VA increase Veterans' immediate access to programs and support
- Stay tuned for the winners of the 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge!

## May

This special edition focused on our partners' incredible and inspiring response to the coronavirus pandemic, featuring the following stories:

- VHA partner ACEP has 40,000 emergency physician members—they're fighting the COVID-19 pandemic
- Y-USA offers Veterans the chance to stay active while staying at home
- Full steam ahead: OCE will recognize winners of its annual Community Partnership Challenge this summer
- One Veteran shares his positive experience with CCI-supported LED treatment, which can be done at home

- In case you missed it: Learn more about VA's COVID-19 response
- What motivates and inspires OCE and CCI team members?

## July

- VHA and VA employees share heartwarming stories to raise spirits
- OCE and CCI have a Sharepoint site
- Veterans find comfort in caring for furry friends through pet adoption
- Our OCE and CCI team members view their work as an honor and a way to repay a debt
- OCE and CCI are now part of DEAN
- In case you missed it: OCE partners keep finding new ways to reach Veterans during COVID-19



February, May, and July Newsletters

# VA Insider



**PATRIOTlink helps Veterans find resources**



**Helping Veterans with service dog costs**

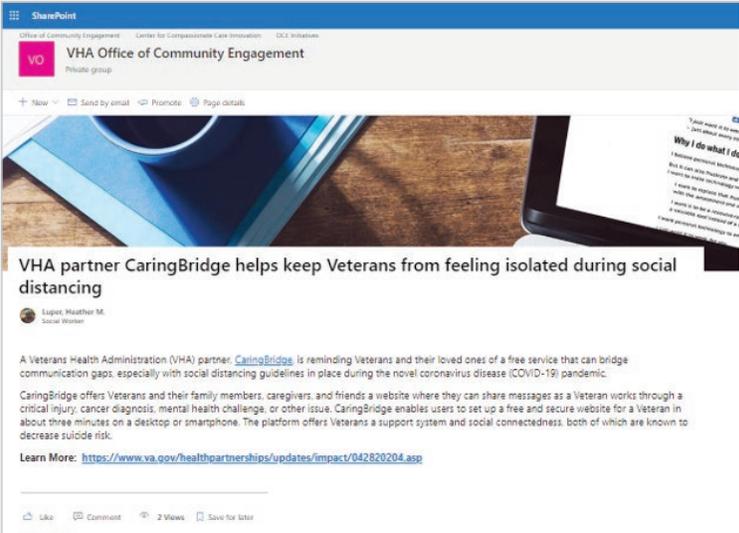


**Study shows clinicians want to help Veterans beyond physical health**

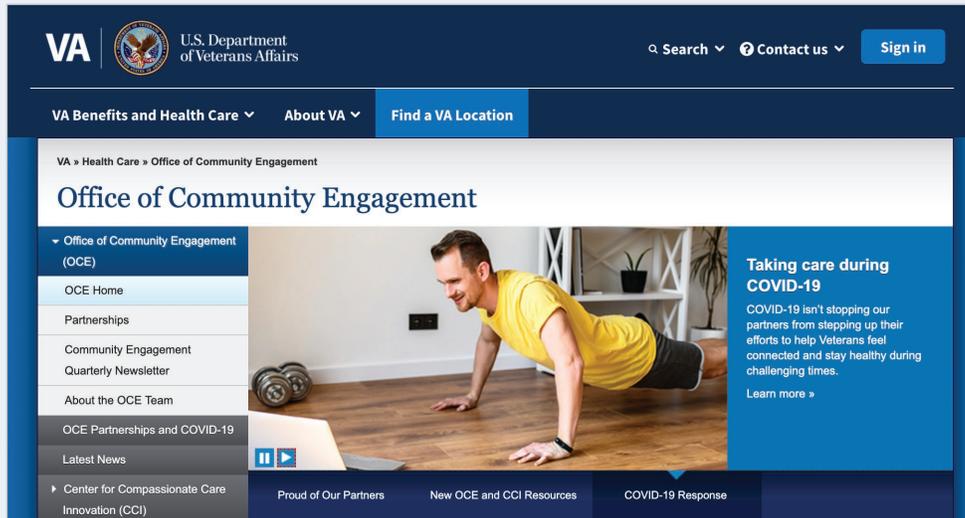


**Choose Home initiative helps at-risk Veterans receive comprehensive, coordinated care at home**

# OCE and CCI SharePoint site



# OCE Website



## Dr. Beck's Letter

### 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge judging begins in February!

### Learn about this year's Challenge topic: The Social Determinants of Health

Staff members from VA medical centers throughout the country have submitted their nonmonetary, community-level partnerships for consideration to the 2020 VHA Community Partnership Challenge. The submission window closed on January 31, and a judging panel will start deliberating to choose the top three partnerships between VHA and nongovernmental organizations. The VHA Office of Community Engagement (OCE) is proud to be the steward of the Challenge. The winners of this year's Challenge will be announced in

early summer. Visit the "[Updates](#)" page of OCE's website to learn more about the winners, who will be recognized by the Under Secretary for Health/Executive in Charge during a formal awards ceremony.

OCE chose Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) as the theme of this year's Challenge because of how important they are for Veterans. You can read more about the importance of positive SDOH in OCE's next quarterly [newsletter](#), coming in February. Be sure to look out for the winners in the early summer and for the announcement of next year's Challenge theme, which will be made in October. We can't wait for you to learn more about the great work VHA teams are doing on behalf of Veterans, and hope you will identify partnership opportunities that benefit Veterans based on the best practices highlighted through this year's Challenge!

# Top 5 Reasons Why You Should Partner With VHA

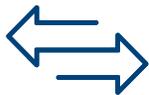
As the largest integrated health care system in the United States, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) proudly provides the 9 million Veterans it serves exemplary care and a system of support. VHA's efforts are strengthened by the invaluable contributions and resources of nongovernmental community and national organizations that work alongside VHA to support our nation's Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

Here are the top 5 reasons why you should join in our mission to help make life better for our nation's heroes:



## Give back to our nation's Veterans who have given so much

There is no better feeling than knowing that you have helped someone, especially those who have fulfilled their promise to defend the American way of life at any cost.



## Exchange information and resources with VHA

Learn about Veteran-specific conditions and needs and become part of a network that shares the latest information, research outcomes, and clinical practice recommendations.



## Fulfill a need

As a government entity, there are services that VHA is legally unable to provide. Your work can close those gaps and supplement VHA services at the local or national level.



## Collaborate with people who share your passion to serve Veterans

Connect with like-minded people who want to help those who are in need, particularly service members whose sacrifices maintain our freedom and rights.



## Expand your organization's reach

Share your services or expertise with more people than ever before, including Veterans who are not enrolled in VHA for care.

VHA is committed to pursuing public-private partnerships (P3s) and exploring new and innovative ways to support the Department of Veterans Affairs' mission. To share a partnership opportunity or consult with VHA's Office of Community Engagement on a non-monetary partnership, please contact our office via email: [communityengagement@va.gov](mailto:communityengagement@va.gov).

For more information, please visit [va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships).



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration

Veterans Health Administration Office of Community Engagement

**VA**



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

Veterans Health Administration

**Veterans Health Administration**

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[va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships)

September 2020

