A Message from the VHA Acting Chief Nursing Officer and the Deputy Chief Nursing Officer/Executive Director, Office of Nursing Services

Welcome to 2026, and congratulations on a highly successful year of caring for our nation's heroes. In this review, we highlight a few areas where VA nursing has continued to *support and enable* the VA Secretary's focus of effort, "*Veterans First*." For 2025, *Veterans First* has meant a focus on strategic drivers, with enablers – all designed to help VA focus on areas most critically needed to ensure Veterans receive timely, high-quality care. Strategic drivers include:

- Timely Access to Care – *Any Door*
- Well-being of the Veterans at the Center of the Enterprise – *Health, Housing*
- Final Salute – *Honoring Veterans with a Final Tribute*

With these strategic drivers, and with Federal Electronic Healthcare Record (EHR) modernization serving as a key enabler, VA nurses have not only risen to the challenge but have led critical innovations and groundbreaking advancements in clinical care and care management. Throughout this transformation, they have remained steadfast in upholding the cultural pillars of shared governance: accountability, ownership, partnership, and mutual respect.

*Note: Throughout this message, you'll find clickable images, QR codes, and links to help guide access to additional information and resources.*

In 2025, VA nurses, working in close collaboration with social workers, achieved a major milestone in support of Timely Access to Care: the full deployment of Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CCICM) across all 139 facilities. Nursing and social work coordinators from across multiple clinical programs have now been assigned to support over 7,000 Veterans, to include those in rural locations, with high-complexity care coordination needs. By utilizing existing nursing and social work clinicians, CCICM has demonstrated resources and operational optimization, achieving $21 million in cost avoidance in 2025 while reducing emergency department visits, along with inpatient and residential admissions – ultimately creating greater and more timely access to care.

While placing the well-being of the Veterans at the center of the enterprise, VA nursing has led across numerous domains, marking a breadth of accomplishments achieved through the VHA–Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan (NWSP). The 10-year VHA-NWSP

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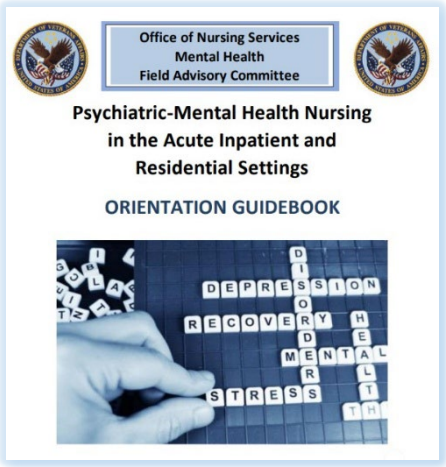
VHA-NWSP Pillars

provides the framework for cultivating a workforce optimally supported to achieve the four VA statutory missions. Ultimately, the VHA-NWSP supports a strong workforce armed with tools and resources to provide world-class care while championing nursing excellence by aligning with VA's health care priorities, including the High-Reliability Organization *(HRO)*, and ICARE *(Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence*) themes. The VHA-NWSP achieved significant progress in 2025, delivering twelve new resources now available in the VHA – NWSP Resource Library. These additions include the Nurse Practitioner Resource Guide, the Nurse Career Advancement Resource Guide, the Evidence-Based Practice Guidebook, and the comprehensive Nurse Well-Being and Organizational Safety Guidebook—each designed to support professional growth, clinical excellence, and organizational resilience. This document offers workplace violence prevention & aftercare, practice interventions, and system strategies to support nurse well-being and organizational safety. Throughout 2025, the publication of these new resources was supported by a monthly, recorded community of practice call, where these guides were showcased by the teams responsible for their development. In each case, these guides were designed to enable VA nurses to provide world-class care to Veterans, while advancing nursing practice and transforming healthcare delivery, so please be sure to review and share widely.




In addition to the products developed in support of the VHA-NWSP, another invaluable resource, produced by the Office of Nursing Services (ONS) Mental Health Field Advisory Committee, was an updated orientation guidebook for Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing (P-MHN) in the Acute Inpatient and Residential Settings Orientation Guidebook, focusing on safety and suicide prevention, among many other topics critical to P-MHN. According to the 2024 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report (Part 2), 18 Veterans commit suicide each day, making this one of the most pressing issues that health care providers face. Deaths by suicide and suicide attempts continue to occur in inpatient settings in the U.S., the physical environment being the root cause in most cases. P-MHNs are often the first to recognize potential risks or harm to Veterans and staff, and by using this guidebook, can mitigate risks through assessment, monitoring, and intervention.

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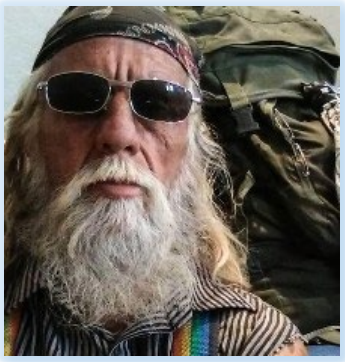
Homelessness

VA nurses also make significant contributions to caring for and supporting homeless Veterans, a critical component in ensuring these Veterans are always at the center of what VA does every day. Nurses not only provide clinical care but also deliver outreach, advocacy, and most importantly, trust. Before clinical care and social support can begin, the VA nurse and social workers play this pivotal role – *building trust.* Providing compassionate continuity and delivering trauma-informed communications, VA nurses build trust through consistent presence. As this trust matures, many homeless Veterans begin to accept all that VA can offer in helping them rebuild their lives and achieve personal dignity. For nurses, this can mean providing care, developing individualized care plans, coordinating specialty care, and supporting crisis interventions and suicide risk assessments, all while serving as the Veteran's advocate within the VA system. In FY25, and along with all that supports this at-risk group, VA nurses contributed to permanently housing 51,936 Veterans, the single highest total since VA started tracking unique Veterans housed.



***"To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our nation's military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors."***

Honor Walk

The VA motto speaks to all who serve Veterans at VA, but for nurses, it's especially meaningful. As a Veteran breathes their last breath, it's most often a nurse who is at the bedside. In addition to being on the frontlines of clinical care, VA nurses are also on the frontlines of caring for the family, caregivers, and survivors in their moment of greatest need. VA nurses have continued to honor and lead traditions and rituals across VA, designed to provide a Final Salute for Veterans who have passed. Across VA, Final Salutes take on many forms, all with a single-minded goal: to honor the fallen and their service to this nation. Final Salutes can be a bedside remembrance with a chaplain, care team, and family; an 'honor walk' where care teams, employees, and family team members line hallways in remembrance; or to memorial services honoring all who have recently passed. A unifying theme throughout is the VA nurse, *meeting the moment and making a difference*.

Looking ahead into 2026, we are both honored to be at your side as we pursue transformational changes needed to advance Veteran-centric care, evidence-based practice, and support for all VA nurses. While maintaining focus on *Veterans First*, the central enabler in realizing these advancements and transformational changes is accelerating the implementation of the Federal EHR modernization program, one in which VA nurses will

play an essential role. VA nurses at all levels across and throughout the system will be engaged in this critical change – and make no mistake, it's a challenge well-suited for our highly resilient VA nurses. To support facility implementations, Travel Corps (TC) nurses will be deployed to implementation sites across the U.S., helping to provide bedside and clinical care, freeing local nurses to focus on change management related to system implementation.

ONS SharePoint

We are incredibly pleased with the progress made in 2025, across VA, by you, our exceptionally passionate and caring nursing staff. We are both deeply honored to be VA nurses with you, as we pursue the transformational changes being enabled through *Veterans First*. Please take time to visit the ONS SharePoint site to access resources developed with you, the VA nurse, in mind. Here you will find an abundance of tools, resources, guides, educational opportunities, and the latest *news* from across VA nursing.

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