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# Whole Health – It's All About You

Partnering with You for Health and Well-Being

*A REPORT BY THE VHA OFFICE OF PATIENT CENTERED CARE  
AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION*

**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Patient Centered Care and  
Cultural Transformation

# Whole Health for Life



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## Acronyms

**OPCC&CT:** Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation

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

**VHA:** Veterans Health Administration

**HLA:** HealthLiving Assessment



*Our health team of professionals and Whole Health Partners are eager to partner with you to help you achieve your greatest health and well-being.*

# Welcome

## **Dear Veterans,**

During your military service, you committed your life, health, and well-being to Mission Success in defense of our country. Now, we commit to helping you be mission ready for your life – to optimize your health in service of what matters most to you. We recognize the need to change health care to support you in addressing all aspects of your health and well-being.

System-wide implementation of a whole health approach to your care is one of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) top priorities in service to you! Our new whole health approach to care represents a transformation from traditional disease management, to a more comprehensive approach that is based in a partnership across time focused on the physical, emotional, and social well-being of each Veteran. We are working hard to provide this personalized, proactive, patient-driven approach through the support of not only your health care team, but also trained peers, well-being teachers, coaches, and community partners.

I am committed to ensuring that every Veteran is provided the opportunity to explore their whole health in partnership with us. I encourage you to read the stories of your fellow Veterans in this publication and learn how they took control of their health through partnership with their VA health teams. Working together with community partners across the nation, we look forward to supporting you on your whole health journey.

### **Tracy Gaudet, M.D.**

*Executive Director*

*Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation*

*Department of Veterans Affairs*

# Living Your Life to the Fullest

VA facilities are shifting from a health care system focused primarily on treating disease to one rooted in forming continuous healing relationships and partnerships that support you in achieving your greatest overall well-being. The result is a whole health approach, which is a radical redesign of health care focused on empowering you, the Veteran.

Guided by your personalized health plan, VA's Whole Health System considers the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and environmental elements that work together to provide the best quality of life for you.

As you reconnect with what matters most in your life and learn new approaches to help you live your fullest life, your VA health team will be there each step of the way. THIS is the VA of the future.



## Have a Conversation

Your health team will consist not only of health care providers, but also of peers, well-being teachers, and coaches who may serve as your Whole Health Partner. Learn more about this new role on page 22. Your Whole Health Partner will want to know who you are, what is important to you, and what you need. The path to whole health begins with you and what matters most in your life. You can start by having a conversation about you with your health team so they can help you achieve the things that are most important to you.



## Find Your Community

It can be as simple as having other people to talk to, go to the gym with, meditate with, or engage with in a shared interest. Supportive communities and healing relationships are vital, especially when you're working to reach goals that are important in your life.



## Look at the Big Picture

Think about the big picture when you think about your health. Ask yourself, “What matters most to me? What do I want my health FOR?” Reflect on the factors in your life that impact your well-being. It could be the amount of sleep you get, your relationships at work and home, or your food and drink. We will help you focus on the factors you want to address to support your whole health.



## Set Your Goal

By questioning what matters most to you, your health team can help you discover what gives you a sense of meaning and purpose in your life and partner with you to design a personal health plan that focuses on YOUR goals.



## Build Your Personal Health Plan

Your health team will work with you to meet your individual needs. Your personal health plan may include professional health care, therapies to improve your well-being, and self-care, whatever is needed to help you live your life to the fullest.



*We want to consider the big picture of your life, not just one symptom or challenge.*

# Look at the Big Picture

## GETTING STARTED

**Let's think about your health in a new way. Take some time to envision what matters most to you. What brings you a sense of joy, meaning, and purpose? It all starts with being mindful. Being aware of the reasons you want your health allows you to make conscious, proactive choices about every aspect of your health. Mindful awareness connects you to each component of your well-being and to your whole self.**

These questions mark an important first step to the whole health approach. Writing down and sharing this information with those close to you as well as your health team can make a big difference.

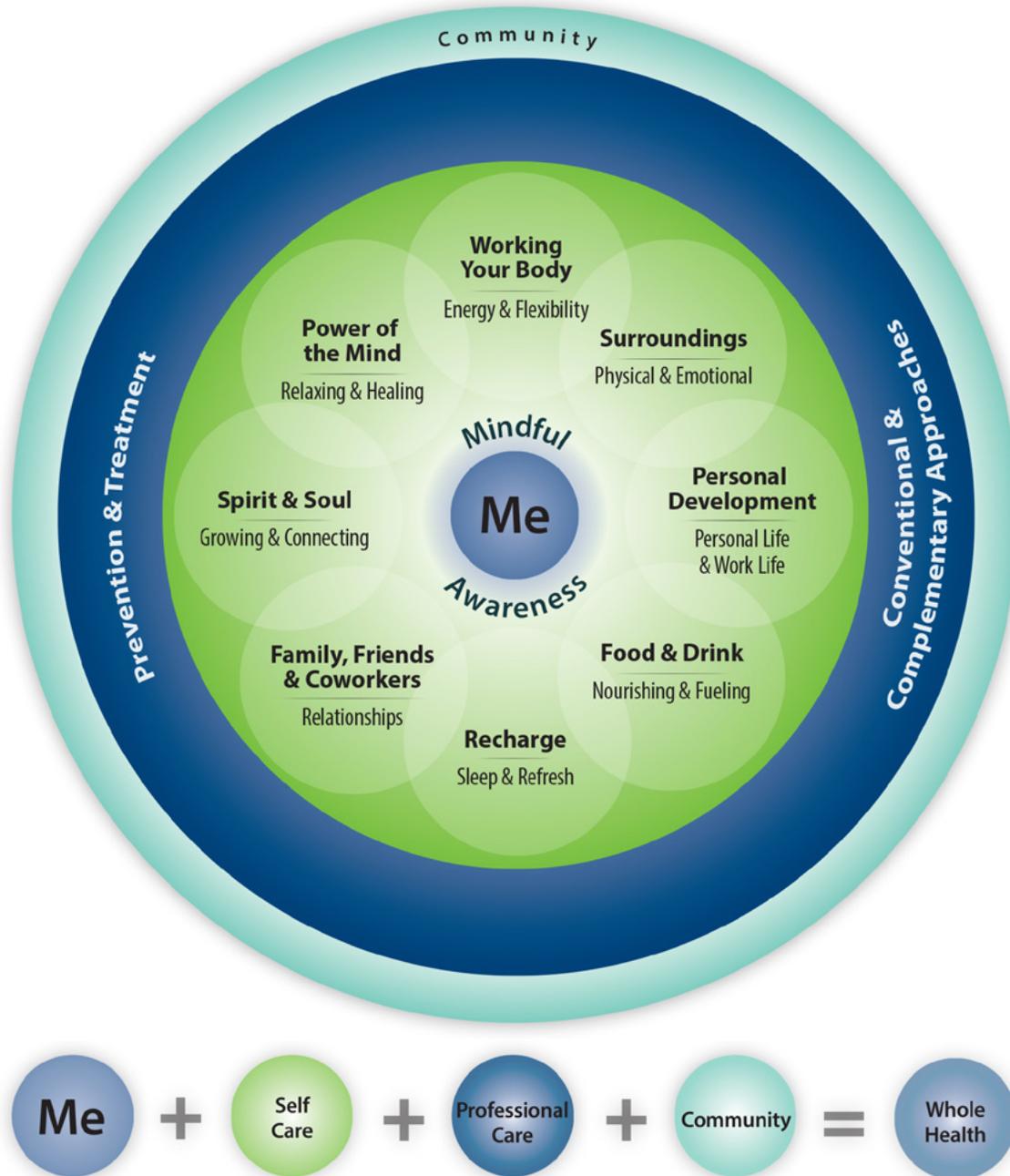
We want to consider the big picture of your life, not just one symptom or challenge, but the big picture. Do you feel rested when you get up in the morning? Are you able to have food and drink you enjoy and helps you feel your best? Do you have relationships that matter to you and fuel you, or do they drain you and make you feel alone? As you work with your health team to build your personal health plan, you will consider the factors affecting your life and learn how you can better support your overall well-being.



Whole health opens the door for your health team to discuss not only your health conditions, but also your well-being. "The question 'what matters most to you' really gets attention, and that is where the impact comes from," says Mary Nelson, the Patient Centered Care Coordinator at Gulf Coast Veterans Health System. "We care about what is inside of you, what makes you tick, and what makes you excited about life."

The Components of Proactive Health and Well-Being are shown in the Circle of Health, on page 8. It helps illustrate the big picture connection between your health and other aspects of your life.

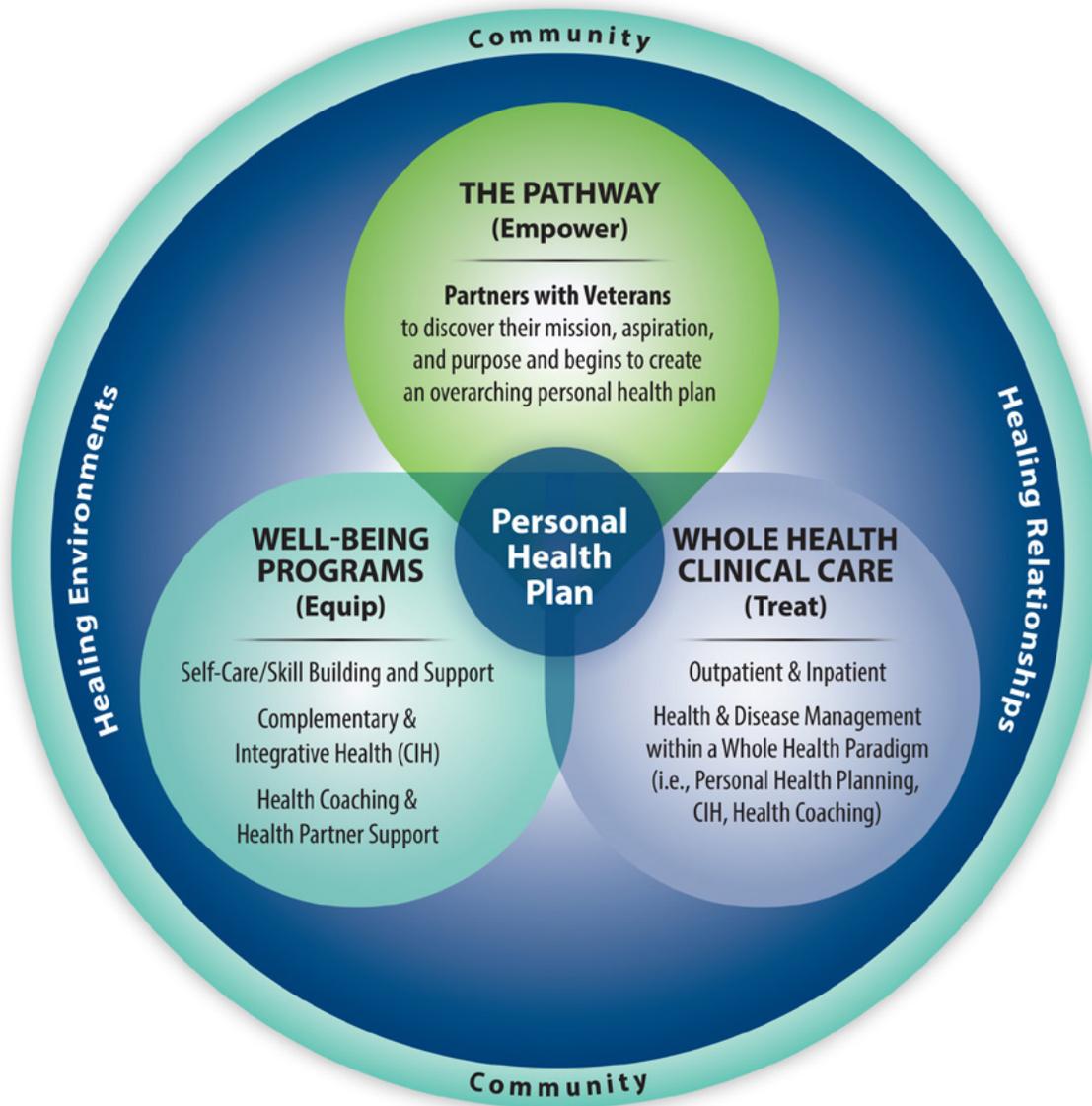
## Components of Proactive Health and Well-Being



**The key at the bottom of the diagram identifies four key parts of this approach.**

- **Me:** The equation begins with you, the “Me” at the center. Your story is unique and your whole health begins with **YOU**. Starting here will help empower you to take charge of your health.
- **Self Care:** Each of us has the power to impact our well-being, but we may not have the skills or support to make those changes. It starts with looking at all the dimensions of your whole health. Even people who cannot be cured can often experience a deeper sense of meaning, peace, joy, or comfort.
- **Professional Care:** Your health team is there to help with the prevention and treatment of disease and illness.
- **Community:** Just as there is a “Me” at the center of the circle, there is a “We” that enfolds it. Your Community is however you define it and often includes where you live, work, and worship, as well as all the people and groups you connect with.

## The Whole Health System



**While the practice of whole health is best illustrated by the Circle of Health, the Whole Health System is the structure through which VA will assist, guide, and provide care to you when you create your personal health plan and practice whole health. As seen here, personal health planning is at the center of the three supporting components that comprise the Whole Health System model:**

- **The Pathway Is EMPOWERING:** We partner with you, as well as your family and community, to explore your mission, purpose, and aspirations that will guide the development of your personal health plan.
- **Well-Being Programs Are EQUIPPING:** We work with you to build the skills and support you need and to identify proactive, integrative health approaches such as stress reduction, physical activity, weight management, tobacco cessation, yoga, tai chi, mindfulness, nutrition, acupuncture, and health coaching that will help you take charge of your health and well-being, prevent diseases, and live your life to the fullest.
- **Whole Health Clinical Care Is TREATING:** You will work with your health team to continue to refine your personal health plan with traditional and complementary and integrative health approaches to support your health and to enhance your self-management strategies to strengthen your health.

THE VETERAN EXPERIENCE

# Barbara

LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE



“The action of putting the Veteran at the center of his or her own healing process is an essential first step for healing.”

**After many years away from the military, Barbara returned to VA for care a few years ago with great hesitation.**

She was sure she would not be welcomed or find what she needed. Looking back, she says her resistance was unfounded. As she works with her health team in Boston and connects with well-being services such as Whole Health Coaching, counseling and meditation, she feels like she is home and on the pathway of “freedom and happiness.” She says, “It was like a fresh start.” She finds the whole health approach to care so valuable, she continues to work at her well-being practices and serves on the VA Veterans Whole Health Communication and Education Task Force.

“The action of putting the Veteran at the center of his or her own healing process is an essential first step for healing,” says Barbara, a Navy Veteran who served from 1969 to 1972. “I appreciate the Circle of Health graphic as a useful guide to always remember how each of us needs to remain in the center of our own health and welfare efforts if we are to achieve total health and well-being, even as we may need major support with these efforts. Within this model, the support given can be immensely more effective and gratifying to all involved.”

Barbara and other Veterans who are engaging in the VA Whole Health System are making the connection between their health and other areas of their lives. They are seeing where the traditional health care model of “find it and fix it” may not be helpful for some conditions. These include post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, sleep-disorders, pain, substance abuse, even diabetes, and heart disease, or cancer. The benefits of the whole health approach extend beyond what is conventionally addressed or provided by health care. Whole health puts you at the center of your health care, promotes self-care and healing, and emphasizes the importance of relationships and partnerships.

“Soul-level wounds are shared wounds. They happen at the level of shared responsibility, and they need to be healed at that level of shared humanity,” says Barbara. “I feel immense gratitude toward health care providers who are willing to share the burdens that Veterans carry.”

## LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE VIDEO RESOURCES:

- ▶ An Overview of the Patient Centered Approach (6 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2sgdopR](https://bit.ly/2sgdopR)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Community (2 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2r1ZlZ6](https://bit.ly/2r1ZlZ6)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Professional Care (2 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2r60Pcj](https://bit.ly/2r60Pcj)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Spirit and Soul (2 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2qWZ4Pm](https://bit.ly/2qWZ4Pm)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Surroundings (2 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2rVoVKU](https://bit.ly/2rVoVKU)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Recharge, Rest, Sleep (1.5 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2sDKJsj](https://bit.ly/2sDKJsj)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Power of the Mind (1.5 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2r5XhGX](https://bit.ly/2r5XhGX)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Food & Drink (2.5 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2rMbgn5](https://bit.ly/2rMbgn5)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Personal Development (3.5 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2rLR98F](https://bit.ly/2rLR98F)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Working Your Body (3 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2r2BVPp](https://bit.ly/2r2BVPp)**
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Family, Friends, and Coworkers (4 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2rVdQJK](https://bit.ly/2rVdQJK)**



### The Following Resources Will Support You in Exploring Your Big Picture:

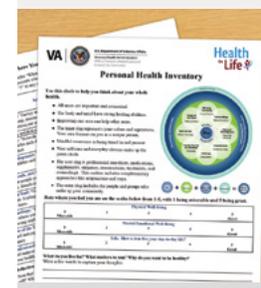
The Guided Meditation Podcast will help you to think about and assess your overall health so you can develop a plan to help you achieve your greatest well-being.

- Guided Meditation Podcast: An Intro on Mindfulness and using the Personal Health Inventory (22:16 mins)  
**[bit.ly/2qX2uBD](https://bit.ly/2qX2uBD)**

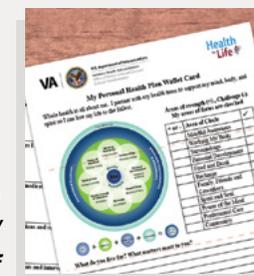
Explore the Personal Health Inventory, print it out, and bring it to your next VA appointment.

- My Story: Personal Health Inventory  
**[bit.ly/2w9Kr0t](https://bit.ly/2w9Kr0t)**

If you prefer a shorter version of this self-assessment tool, please have a look at the short version and the wallet card.



**PHI SHORT VERSION**  
**[www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/docs/PHI\\_Short\\_508.pdf](http://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/docs/PHI_Short_508.pdf)**



**PHI WALLET CARD**  
**[www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/docs/PHI\\_WalletCard\\_508.pdf](http://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/docs/PHI_WalletCard_508.pdf)**



*Hearing a person's story and giving them hope for the future, are keys to activating the individual into self-care.*

# Have a Conversation

## LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU

**You are more than your symptoms. In the Whole Health System, your health team wants to know who you are, what is important to you, and what you need. Setting your goals and building your personal health plan starts with this conversation about you.**



While determining what your goal is, you are encouraged to explore what is driving you to try a new approach or to seek help. Is it being able to hike, fish, or spend quality time with loved ones? By exploring what matters most to you, your health team can help you discover what gives you a sense of meaning and purpose in your life.

The Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System is working with patients dealing with pain to not just manage it, but reverse it through the Integrative Medicine for Patient Aligned Care Team (IMPACT) for Pain Clinic.

Veterans love the IMPACT program. Dr. Henri Roca, a physician and director of IMPACT says he now hears patients say they have hope and feel like they have been listened to and heard. "Those two things, hearing a person's story and giving them hope for the future, are keys to activating the individual into self-care," says Dr. Roca. "When they feel they can make a difference and have been heard, they are more likely to engage in activities that will actually improve their health."

THE VETERAN EXPERIENCE

# Marvin

HAVE A CONVERSATION



“It is really a 180-degree shift of how we approach health care, and now the Veteran really has the opportunity to be in the driver’s seat.”

**An officer in the Army from 1980 to 1983, Marvin Everest has been putting his skills as a former community college educator to work at the Gulf Coast Veteran Health Care System in Biloxi, Mississippi, where he partners with Veterans on their whole health journey.**

Marvin leads one of the Whole Health Facilitated Groups, called Taking Charge of My Life and Health. The first question he likes to ask Veterans is what is important to them.

“I try to give them time to think about it,” he says. “Because that is a big question, and often times they have never thought about it before.”

During these whole health sessions, Veterans are encouraged to look at their health in a different way.

Marvin appreciates how whole health asks Veterans for their perspective on how to approach their health and what is important to them in their lives. “It is really a 180-degree shift of how we approach health care, and now the Veteran really has the opportunity to be in the driver’s seat,” he says.

Marvin recognizes some Veterans will be skeptical and says he wasn’t sold on the practice of whole health until he tried it for himself. At first, he found mindfulness practices to be a bit of a struggle, but says he now cherishes them.

He credits whole health with helping him deal with his biggest health issue, an up-and-down struggle with weight. “Part of this program is using the skills that I’ve obtained as a whole health facilitator and as a teacher, and applying them directly to helping Veterans as well as myself by changing my lifestyle so I don’t get back into that yo-yo syndrome of gaining and losing weight.”

Marvin says controlling his weight is not just about looking better. It is also closely tied to what he values. “The biggest reason I want to lose weight is so that I can help my family, interact with my family and my community.” He says being at a healthy weight not only makes it easier to do things he loves like camping and hiking, but also helps him to feel more confident. This makes it easier for him to help others, something that is very important to him.

As a Veteran teaching other Veterans about whole health, Marvin is in a unique position to relate to his fellow Veterans and can make them feel more comfortable when they share with the group. He describes the Veteran-to-Veteran relationship as one of trust and common experiences, “a dynamic combination.”

He says his message to Veterans who haven’t yet decided to come to VA is to “try it.” And for those who have tried it and maybe had a bad experience in the past, “come back” because it not only provides excellent health care, the VA now offers many complementary approaches such as the MOVE! Weight Management program, yoga, tai chi and many others.

## HAVE A CONVERSATION VIDEO RESOURCES

- ▶ Whole Health Care Comes to Life Through Interactive Patient Care (3 mins)  
[bit.ly/2sDMIIE](https://bit.ly/2sDMIIE)
- ▶ Health for Life Through The Voice of the Veteran (4 mins)  
[bit.ly/2rBbfEi](https://bit.ly/2rBbfEi)



### Taking Charge of My Life and Health

**This course teaches participants how to lead a nine-week Whole Health group for Veterans on how to take care of their health and live their lives based on what is most important to them. In these peer-led groups, Veterans reflect on their health in a different way and gain skills and tools to improve their health and well-being in a supportive setting.**



### Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy

**A 2011 study of Mindfulness based cognitive therapy found it led to a 34 percent relative risk reduction in relapses of major depressive disorders. Another well-designed trial found after completing mindfulness based cognitive therapy, 75 percent of people with a history of major depression were able to discontinue antidepressant medications at 15-month follow-up.**  
[bit.ly/2r6gxUB](https://bit.ly/2r6gxUB)



*Aligning your health with  
your day-to-day goals and life  
aspirations is a critical component  
of whole health.*

# Set Your Goal

## FINDING YOUR MISSION

**Once you narrow in on what matters most to you, you will use that information to set goals to improve your health and well-being.**



This approach to health is focused on empowering and equipping you to take charge of your health and well-being so you can live your life to the fullest. A goal not only motivates us to make changes, but provides a way to track our progress. Working on goals also builds skills and confidence that can translate to other areas of life.

Aligning your health with your day-to-day goals and life aspirations is a critical component of whole health. Using the My Story: Personal Health Inventory, you can start identifying your goals. Bring this completed inventory to your next meeting with your health team and use it to co-create your personal health plan.

This assessment will help you explore the areas in life that affect your health such as your sleep, what you eat, your relationships, and work environment so you can identify the things you want to address. Using the Personal Health Inventory makes it easier for your health team to partner with you. And better yet, it keeps you in control of your life and health.

Another way to choose and achieve a goal that matters to you is to complete the My Health Choices goal setting tool.

THE VETERAN EXPERIENCE

# Judy

SET YOUR GOAL



“It’s due to the whole health program that I’m able to sit here...”

**Judy Thedford served in the Air Force from 1979 to 1992. She came to VA for help with severe, chronic migraines and was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Judy was extremely depressed, anxious, and suicidal. She attempted to take her life on several occasions and wasn’t able to leave her home or even walk down a dark hallway in her house.**

That was before she participated in a whole health course via telehealth. Working with her health team, Judy examined what was important to her and decided her goal was to train her dog, Blue, as a service dog to help her deal with her anxiety. She knew it would help and the research shows that also. Animal assisted therapies have been shown to lower cortisol levels - a hormone that regulates many of the physical reactions to stress.

“Before Blue was trained I wouldn’t go outside. I wouldn’t leave my house. I wouldn’t walk down the hallway to my bedroom. A lot of things just reminded me of horrible nightmares that a lot of Veterans have,” says Judy. “Blue sticks with me close. And she is able to go with me any place I want to go.”

Judy says now she can get up in the morning and walk down her hallway with the light off and deal with the quiet of her home. These accomplishments, small to some, mean the world to her. Better yet, she says she can talk about her struggles without feeling judged. She credits her work with whole health and VA’s use of expressive writing therapies for helping her work through her emotions and feel more connected to a community of Veterans. Expressive writing therapies, like the one Judy is engaged in, are a great way to express feelings and thoughts and have been very effective in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. “It is due to the whole health program that I’m able to sit here with Blue,” she says.

## IMPROVING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR HEALTH TEAM

Olive Ann Phillips is a primary care provider for the IMPACT for Pain Clinic at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System in Little Rock. She is working with Veterans to build personal health plans with smart goals using a combination of Whole Health Clinical Care and Well-Being Programs.

When introducing the Circle of Health (see page 8) to patients, she helps them decide what they think they really need to work on and talks with them about what they want and what they can do to get where they want to be.

Ms. Phillips says whole health has changed her practice over time. She now starts her relationship with patients by creating a short timeline of their lives from childhood onward. She says it does not take a lot of extra time, but yields critically important information. “When you ask these questions, you really find out about a patient’s life events and stories that have molded them.”

Integrating the whole health approach in Little Rock has offered her “a whole new way of doing things,” she says. It appeals to her because it doesn’t involve another medication, which she thinks is especially positive and important given the growing opioid epidemic. She says whole health gives her tools that can potentially “improve their (Veterans’) health and wellness rather than contribute to the pill burden.”

### SET YOUR GOAL VIDEO RESOURCE:

- ▶ The Road Ahead (14 mins)  
[bit.ly/2sTtbb0](https://bit.ly/2sTtbb0)



### Therapeutic Journaling

**Expressive writing is an evidence-based treatment for post-traumatic stress. The simple act of expressing thoughts and feelings on paper about challenging and upsetting events can allow us to move forward by expressing and letting go of the feelings involved.**

[bit.ly/2rVJNBH](https://bit.ly/2rVJNBH)



### Animal-Assisted Therapy

**Studies show a dog-human relationship leads to a decrease in cortisol levels, indicating that the dog-human relationship has the potential to decrease stress levels in both.**

[bit.ly/2rVnpZf](https://bit.ly/2rVnpZf)



## HealthLiving Assessment

The HealthLiving Assessment (HLA) is a powerful tool that can help Veterans better understand their health habits and overall health. It's available at the My HealthVet website. The HLA asks each user a set of personalized questions. The HLA uses your answers to give personalized feedback on your risk for disease and provides suggestions on how to improve your health. It takes about 20 minutes to complete and is available online 24/7. [www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/healthliving-assessment](http://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/healthliving-assessment)



# ACCESSING YOUR WHOLE HEALTH

## Where will your whole health journey begin?

Many Veterans connect with programs and practices through referrals from VA care providers or counselors, but you can engage with whole health by asking your health team for more information or through the many online resources provided by VA. This is a big transformation for VA and some sites are further developed than others.

If you find traveling to a medical center complicated or stressful, telehealth may be an option. This VA service uses video conferencing to connect you to your health team, enabling you to communicate with other Veterans and team members in real-time. This computer link can improve your access to care and help you learn more about whole health as you work to create your personal health plan. In this way, technology really can help you take control of your own health.

Telehealth has allowed the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, which covers a geographic region of more than 300 square miles, to offer whole health training to patients who cannot easily go to the clinics or the medical center in Biloxi, Mississippi. In just a year, this VA health system has conducted eight Whole Health Facilitated Groups, both in person and via telehealth.

Laura Pistey, RN, Health Promotion Disease Prevention Manager for Gulf Coast, says these groups have been well received by participants. "The first telehealth group...bonded so strongly that they actually wanted to physically meet all together in one spot," she says. "It was very heartwarming."

Telehealth and other new and creative technologies are designed to connect you to your health team and other services when you need to and wherever you are. Some other tools to help you virtually practice whole health include:

## Whole Health Library

You and your health team can learn more about whole health and find resources, onsite programs, clinical tools, and other materials through this online repository.

[projects.hsl.wisc.edu/SERVICE](http://projects.hsl.wisc.edu/SERVICE)

## STAR Well Kit

This is a web-based toolkit for learning about wellness practices and integrative medicine tools for Veterans. The toolkit features Veterans describing their experiences of how integrative medicine tools and techniques may help you. You can also follow along with brief demonstrations of various practices.

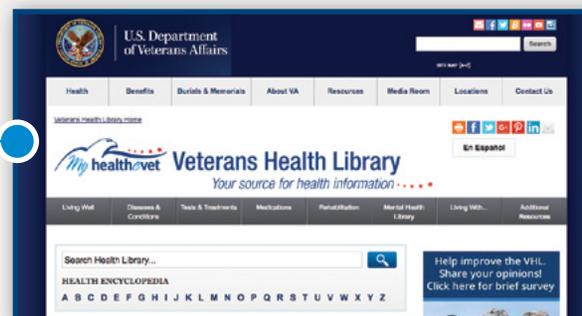
[www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/education/STAR](http://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/education/STAR) (Introduction 16:03 min)



## Veterans Health Library

This is a one-stop source for health information to help Veterans stay well-informed and equipped to self-manage their conditions and diseases. You will find VHA's nine Healthy Living Messages and more than 1,500 health sheets, 150-plus videos, go-to-guides, and flipbooks, all clinically reviewed, available here.

[www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/22,welcome](http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/22,welcome)



## My HealtheVet

More than 55.8 million Veterans used My HealtheVet in 2016. This online resource offers you tips and support tools to help you partner with your health team to manage your health. Enrolling in My HealtheVet, enables you to refill your prescriptions, track your appointments, message your health team, access your health records, and more.

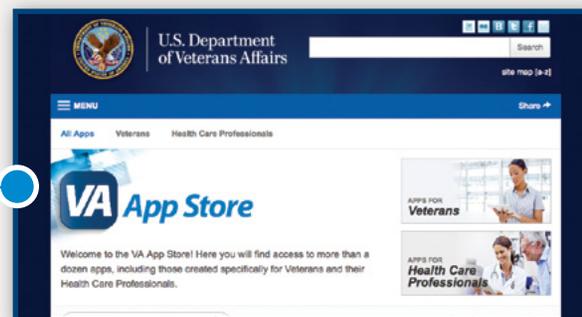
[www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)



## VA Mobile Health

This program is designed to improve your health by providing technologies that expand Clinical Care beyond the traditional office visit. It includes a mindfulness-coach app to help you practice whole health.

[mobile.va.gov/appstore](http://mobile.va.gov/appstore)





*“The Veterans know what is best for them and we have recommendations on how they can optimize their health and wellness.”*

*— Raymond Bowne, RN*

## YOUR HEALTH TEAM

Your VA health team will partner with you and help guide you on your path to health and well-being, but you are always the team captain. Looking to the future, your health team will include not only your clinicians, but also your Whole Health Partner and a Well-Being Team.

A Whole Health Partner is a new role. This person partners with Veterans to complete a Personal Health Inventory and explore aspects of a personal health plan in group and individual settings. The Whole Health Partner also provides information and advocates for Veterans' personal health goals, plans, and shared goals with clinical care teams. This steward position helps Veterans new to the program navigate the Whole Health System and orients them to services, hours, locations, staff, tools, resources, and other information they need to understand and utilize the program.

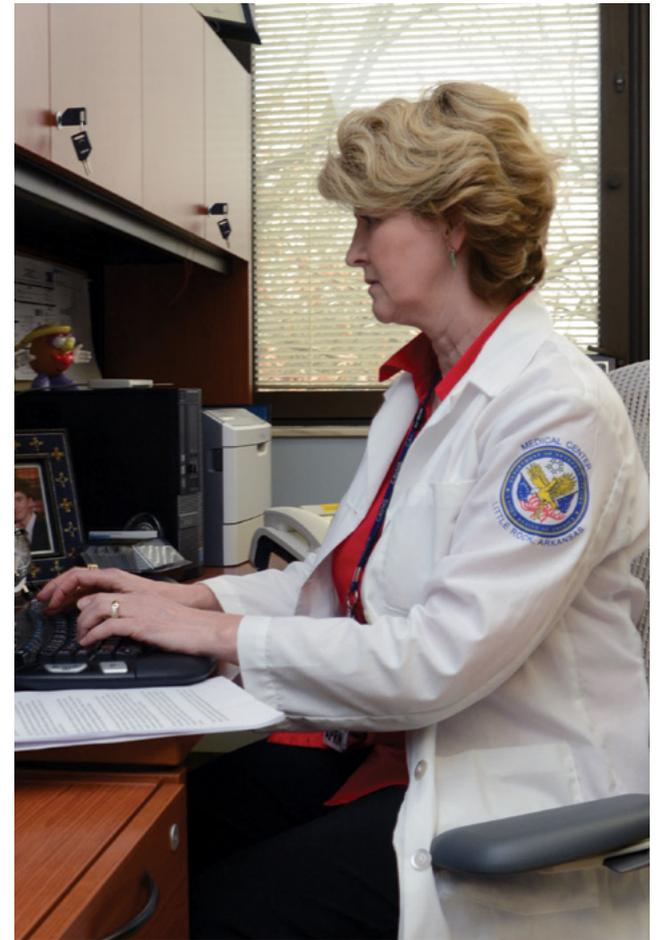
“We are mere consultants. Our Veterans know their bodies, they know what is right for them... We as clinicians know medicine, nursing, social work, behavioral health. We try to marry those two together,” says Raymond Bowne, RN, the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Veterans Health Education Coordinator. “The Veterans know what is best for them and we have recommendations on how they can optimize their health and wellness. Hopefully we come together in a way that the Veteran says, ‘You know what? That is a great opportunity. That is a great idea. I want to run with it.’”

As part of their primary and whole health care, many Veterans are working with Patient Aligned Care Teams to plan for life-long well-being, even if they are dealing with complicated medical issues. These teams can include dietitians, pharmacists, social workers, health educators, and prevention and mental health clinicians. In addition to working with these teams, VA also has you identify your goals, make a personal health plan, and provides follow-up to help you reach your goals. We will work in detail with you to address your challenges and honor your experiences.

## How VA Primary Care Team or Health Coach Helped Veterans Reach Their Personal Health Goals



A recent survey of Veterans measured how health teams helped individuals reach their personal health goals. The results showed more than half of respondents were either referred to another professional or a class or activity, received encouragement and support, or were motivated by members of their health team.





*You will design your personal health plan based on what matters most to you—and to help you achieve your individual goals.*

# Build Your Personal Health Plan

## FINDING THE APPROACH THAT WORKS FOR YOU

**Once you identify what motivates you to achieve your best health and well-being, your health team will partner with you to design a personal health plan grounded in your values.**

You will design your plan based on what matters most to you and what will help you achieve your goals. Your personal health plan may include whole health Clinical Care and complementary approaches, such as acupuncture, yoga, tai chi, MOVE! Weight Management program, tobacco cessation, or the arts and humanities. Your plan will also include self-care and the things you can do to support your health and self-manage ongoing health conditions.

A recent study of Veterans who went through personal health planning found their experiences with the process were related to better outcomes in the areas that mattered most to them. Veterans described the experience as positive, collaborative, patient-centered, and important to their health. Of those



surveyed, 88 percent responded that a personal health plan is important to health and well-being and 75 percent recommend setting a personal health goal. Better patient experiences with personal health planning were related to better patient reported outcomes, including measures of health status, self-efficacy for managing illness and activation for engaging healthy behaviors, and perceptions of provider communication.

Another study evaluated the impact of personal health planning at two VA sites. One whole health site, where primary care teams helped Veterans establish a personal health plan, reported significantly better health status, self-efficacy, and activation (see page 26).



## Practice Mindfulness Through One of These Plug and Play Podcasts:

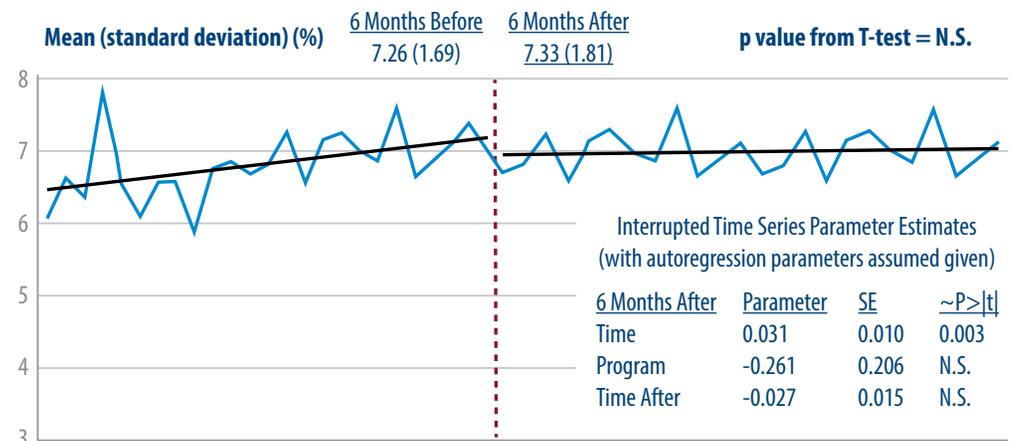
- Introduction to Meditation (1 min)  
[bit.ly/2s5IG3e](https://bit.ly/2s5IG3e)
- Grounding Meditation (5 mins)  
[bit.ly/2r3wz6C](https://bit.ly/2r3wz6C)
- Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation (10 mins)  
[bit.ly/2r7nF2V](https://bit.ly/2r7nF2V)
- Mindfulness of Sounds Meditation (10 mins)  
[bit.ly/2r7nEvT](https://bit.ly/2r7nEvT)
- Compassionate Breathing Meditation (10 mins)  
[bit.ly/2sUTTjw](https://bit.ly/2sUTTjw)
- Loving Kindness Meditation (10 mins)  
[bit.ly/2rX4mgQ](https://bit.ly/2rX4mgQ)
- Body Scan Meditation (15 mins)  
[bit.ly/2shkPwZ](https://bit.ly/2shkPwZ)
- Body Scan with Loving Kindness Phrases (15 mins)  
[bit.ly/2rWLK0i](https://bit.ly/2rWLK0i)

## Experiences of Veterans in Personal Health Planning

88%	Personal health goal is important to health and well-being
75%	Would recommend setting a personal health goal
74%	Had enough say in selecting a personal health goal
73%	Made progress toward reaching personal health goal
72%	Someone followed up to discuss progress on personal health goal
70%	Often discuss personal health goal at visits with VA primary care team or coach
69%	Relationship with VA health team or Health Coach was helpful in making progress towards personal health goal
68%	Choosing a personal health goal improved my health and well-being

The study also illustrated health benefits in those with a personal health plan. The chart below shows Veterans with diabetes who engaged in health planning achieved better blood sugar levels and control of their diabetes (hemoglobin A1Cs).

## Trends in Blood Sugar (Hemoglobin A1C) Levels in the 24 Months Before and After Beginning Personal Health Planning



Trend of modest increase in HbA1C levels over time tempered by PHP initiation

## Self-Care Includes:

All the choices you make each day impact your physical, mental, and spiritual health. Taking stock of where you are now and where you want to be in each of these areas is the first step in living a healthier life.



**Working Your Body**



**Surroundings**



**Personal Development**



**Food and Drink**



**Recharge**



**Family, Friends, and Co-workers**



**Spirit and Soul**



**Power of the Mind**

THE VETERAN EXPERIENCE

# Alex

BUILD YOUR PERSONAL HEALTH PLAN



“*The VA is on the cutting edge of listening to what is important to the Veteran.*”

## **The need for change and control is something Alex Stallworth understands.**

A former Marine, he had trouble finding his way after leaving the service. When he came to the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System in 2014, he was dealing with homelessness and addiction and had a history of difficulties with the law. He says the first glimmer of hope he felt in years was when a VA counselor told him he was accepted into an in-patient drug rehabilitation program. He has learned about the whole health approach through his on-going care at the VA.

Whole health has taught him to set goals, take steps, and identify barriers. He points to the mindful awareness tools he learned, such as breathing exercises and gratitude meditation, as things he now uses to help him through each day.

“Whole health to me means taking control of your destiny,” says Alex, who now works as a Peer Support Specialist and Whole Health Group Facilitator. His favorite thing about working with whole health groups is the growth and the confidence he sees in other Veterans when they participate. “They can take charge of their health care,” he says.

Because of shame and embarrassment, Alex says he held his story back for a long time. It took him awhile to realize how much it helps him to talk about his journey and how much it helps others to hear him do that. He is grateful for the changes he has been able to make in his life and he now shares his story through the Whole Health Groups he leads. “I never could have told my story if there were no ears

that wanted to listen,” he says. “The VA is on the cutting edge of listening to what is important to the Veteran.”

Without VA programs, Alex says he hates to even think about what would have happened to him. “I probably wouldn’t be here. The gratefulness and willingness to help others would be lost in the graveyard,” he says.

Through a series of small goals, Alex has achieved a large goal. He and his family have purchased their first home, and he is enjoying time with them. “When I walked up to my first house for the first time, the first house that I ever owned, it was unbelievable. It was like living a dream because I never thought I would attain a home. . . . To put my key in the front door, it was a dream come true.”

## BUILD YOUR PERSONAL HEALTH PLAN VIDEO RESOURCES:

- ▶ Whole Health: A Shift Towards Health (13 mins)  
[bcove.me/ygyrew7x](https://bcove.me/ygyrew7x)
- ▶ Whole Health: The Power of You (13 mins)  
[bcove.me/f32kgdfv](https://bcove.me/f32kgdfv)
- ▶ Health for Life: Innovative Practices (6 mins)  
[bit.ly/2sFamsl](https://bit.ly/2sFamsl)
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Family, Friends, and Coworkers (4 mins)  
[bit.ly/2xd2fl2](https://bit.ly/2xd2fl2)

## Whole Health in Action

Preliminary findings suggest that after only 8 weeks of program participation, Veterans reported:

- Improved physical and mental health symptoms
- Decreased medication use
- Positive experience and patient satisfaction



## Learn More About Mindfulness Meditation by Watching One of These Brief Introductory Videos:

- What is Mindfulness? (7 mins)  
[bit.ly/2r3f8TD](https://bit.ly/2r3f8TD)
- Why Mindfulness for VA? (8 mins)  
[bit.ly/2rCDQsE](https://bit.ly/2rCDQsE)
- Four Ways to Cultivate Mindfulness (4 mins)  
[bit.ly/2xv0eXx](https://bit.ly/2xv0eXx)
- Beginning a Mindfulness Practice (5 mins)  
[bit.ly/2r3x2Wq](https://bit.ly/2r3x2Wq)
- Mindfulness and Compassion (4 mins)  
[bit.ly/2shvxUe](https://bit.ly/2shvxUe)



*In whatever way you decide to engage, we are here to support you.*

# Find Your Community

## EXTENDING WHOLE HEALTH PRACTICES INTO YOUR WHOLE LIFE

### You won't have to do this alone.



Whole health encourages you to connect with others at home, work, or in the community to support each other as you work on your goals. It can be as simple as finding other people to talk to, go to the gym with, meditate with, or engage with in a shared interest.

Findings from a study at the Washington DC VA Medical Center show after only eight weeks in the whole health program, Veterans report improvement in their physical and mental health symptoms, use less medication, and have greater overall satisfaction with their health care.

Of course, you're not just taking charge of your health care—you are becoming part of a VA community that will support your health and well-being. Through whole health peer-to-peer groups you can connect with and learn from other Veterans who have shared similar experiences. These healing relationships can be pivotal on your journey to well-being.

Support extends beyond VA's walls as well. The VA is creating healing communities through the expansion of partnerships that support the arts and

humanities for Veterans and their family members. You can also take advantage of telehealth services, the Whole Health Online Library, the Veterans Health Library, the VA Tobacco Quitline (1-855-QUIT-VET), and more to remain connected to a supportive community.

As part of your personal health plan, your health team will help you decide if and which wellness, self-care, and complementary treatments might be a good fit for you. Some possibilities either at VA or in your community outside VA are:

- Acupuncture
- Animal-Assisted Therapy
- Art Therapy
- Biofeedback
- Chiropractic Care
- Chronic Disease Self-Management
- Counseling
- Diabetes Prevention
- Massage
- Meditation
- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
- Movement Therapy
- Music Therapy
- Physical Activity
- Tai Chi
- Therapeutic Journaling
- Tobacco Cessation
- Weight Management
- Yoga

In whatever way you decide to engage, we are here to support you.

THE VETERAN EXPERIENCE

# Nick

FIND YOUR COMMUNITY



“I’ve seen it  
change my life  
dramatically for  
the better.”

**After leaving the military, Nick Wolff faced many hardships on his own. He went through a divorce, bankruptcy, and living on the streets. He describes it as a “rough transition” and says he doesn’t want other Veterans to share his experience.**

“When you are in pain and you don’t know where to turn, it is almost as bad as being in a combat zone,” he says. “You are scared for your life and you worried about how you are going to make it to the next day.”

Having served in the Army from 2005 to 2013, Nick says he was in “pretty bad shape” when he got out. He was struggling with chronic pain and regularly taking medication but knew this wasn’t going to be a long-term solution for him. “I don’t want to take more medication than my 92-year-old grandmother,” he says. “That’s what I was doing.”

All that changed when he found whole health at the VA in Little Rock, Arkansas. There, he has developed a relationship with a health team who listens to him and has open, honest conversations about what he wants his treatment to be and what he wants his health for. “When you. . . ask what you are going to live for when you are better, it makes you realize you have stuff to live for,” he says. “It motivates you to get better.”

In his case, Nick says he started living for himself, his family, and other Veterans and friends. He has four children whom he wants to be able to watch grow and become young adults. He describes his family as active and says he wants to be active with them. He also spends a lot of time helping other Veterans find the assistance they need. Veterans trust Veterans, he says. "We've been there, done that, and got that t-shirt."

Through the whole health approach, he has not only experienced improvements in his relationships, but in his health as well. He raves about the pain relief he experiences from battlefield acupuncture, an integrative health approach he receives at the Little Rock VA. He says this treatment allows him to remember all the things he used to do and is a great alternative to "here's another pill." When he came to whole health, he says couldn't run two miles. Now he can run four to six, something he hasn't been able to do since early in his military service.

The support he receives from his family, his relationships with other Veterans and friends, and his connection to his whole health team all help him stay motivated. Through whole health, he says he's found "love, compassion, friendship, and honesty."

"I've seen it change my life dramatically for the better," he says.

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## FIND YOUR COMMUNITY VIDEO RESOURCES:

- ▶ Health for Life: Strengthening Relationships, From Warrior to Soul Mate (6 mins)  
[bit.ly/2sh8vwR](https://bit.ly/2sh8vwR)
- ▶ A Patient Centered Approach To: Community (2 mins)  
[bit.ly/2r1ZlZ6](https://bit.ly/2r1ZlZ6)



### Battlefield Acupuncture

**This acupuncture technique was named "battlefield acupuncture" because it could be performed in less than ideal conditions. It involves only ear and the insertion of five small gold needles at specific points until the patient feels a reduction in pain.**





*The VA wants to make sure  
Veterans and their families have  
a say in their health care.*

# We're Listening

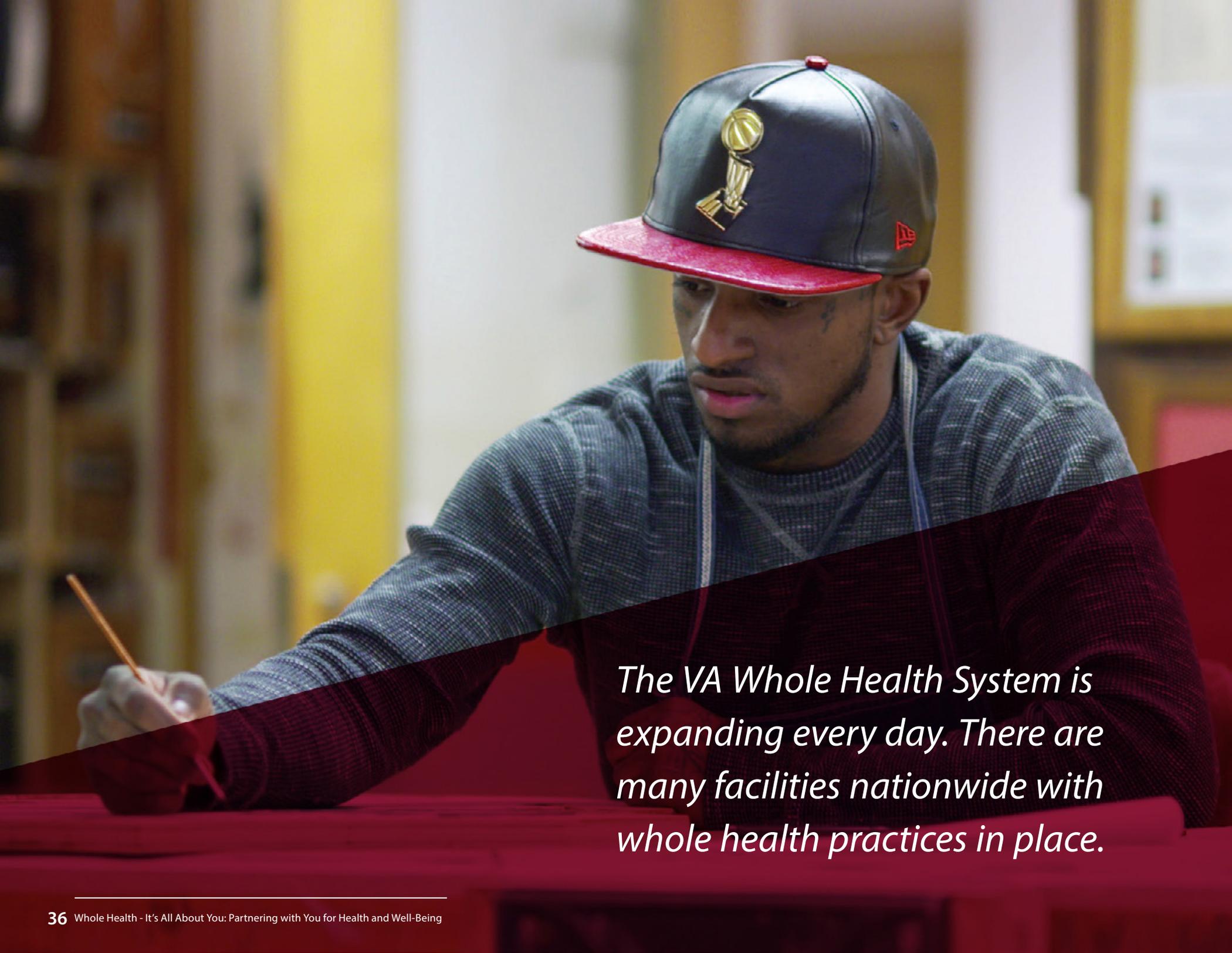
**There is real power in listening and connecting. The VA wants to make sure Veterans and their families have a say in their health care and receive the support they need to achieve what is most important to them in life. Working with Veteran and Family Advisory Councils across the country gives us the opportunity to listen to what is important to you and your families.**

To further include the voice of Veterans in whole health at the VA, the National Veterans Task Force on Whole Health Communication and Education was started in 2014. This group exists to support the development of online and print resources for Veterans. The task force is made up of 12 Veterans from Alabama, Alaska, California, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas. Task force members have reviewed and provided input into the development of the Veteran facing education products as well as the whole health communication products including the OPCC&CT website and this publication.



We are exploring the best ways to create, manage, and sustain effective Veteran and Family Advisory Councils across the country and are looking at the best ways to recruit and train members. This includes building leadership support, developing charter and mission statements and facility action plans, and identifying the elements of effective council meetings.

We want to hear from you as well. If you would like to learn more about whole health and how you can engage in this new approach, please visit our website at [www.va.gov/patientcenteredcare](http://www.va.gov/patientcenteredcare).



*The VA Whole Health System is expanding every day. There are many facilities nationwide with whole health practices in place.*

# Looking Ahead

## **Many facilities across the nation are currently advancing the Whole Health System.**

Even if you don't live near one of the whole health sites, there are still many facilities nationwide with whole health practices in place. In 2018, each of the 18 VA Veterans Integrative Service Networks (VISN) will launch a Whole Health System Flagship facility but elements of whole health are being implemented across the VA system.

We are just beginning this national transformation to whole health. Your partnership is critical. Together we look forward to the future we will create!



# ORIGINAL WHOLE HEALTH DESIGN FACILITIES AND FUTURE SITE PLANS

## Established Centers of Innovation

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System  
 VA North Texas Health Care System  
 Washington DC VA Medical Center  
 VA New Jersey Health Care System  
 Birmingham VA Medical Center

## 2016 Design Sites

VA Boston Healthcare System  
 Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System  
 VA North Texas Health Care System/Plano  
 Community Based Outpatient Clinic  
 Washington DC VA Medical Center  
 Jesse Brown VA Medical Center (Chicago, IL)  
 Harry S. Truman Memorial (Columbia, MO)  
 W.G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical Center  
 (Salisbury, NC)

## Flagship Sites

VISN 1: VA Boston Health Care System  
 VISN 2: VA New Jersey Health Care System  
 (East Orange, NJ)  
 VISN 4: Erie VA Medical Center  
 VISN 5: Beckley VA Medical Center  
 VISN 6: W. G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical  
 Center (Salisbury, NC)  
 VISN 7: Atlanta VA Medical Center

## Emerging Centers of Innovation

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System  
 VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System  
 Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System  
 Orlando VA Medical Center

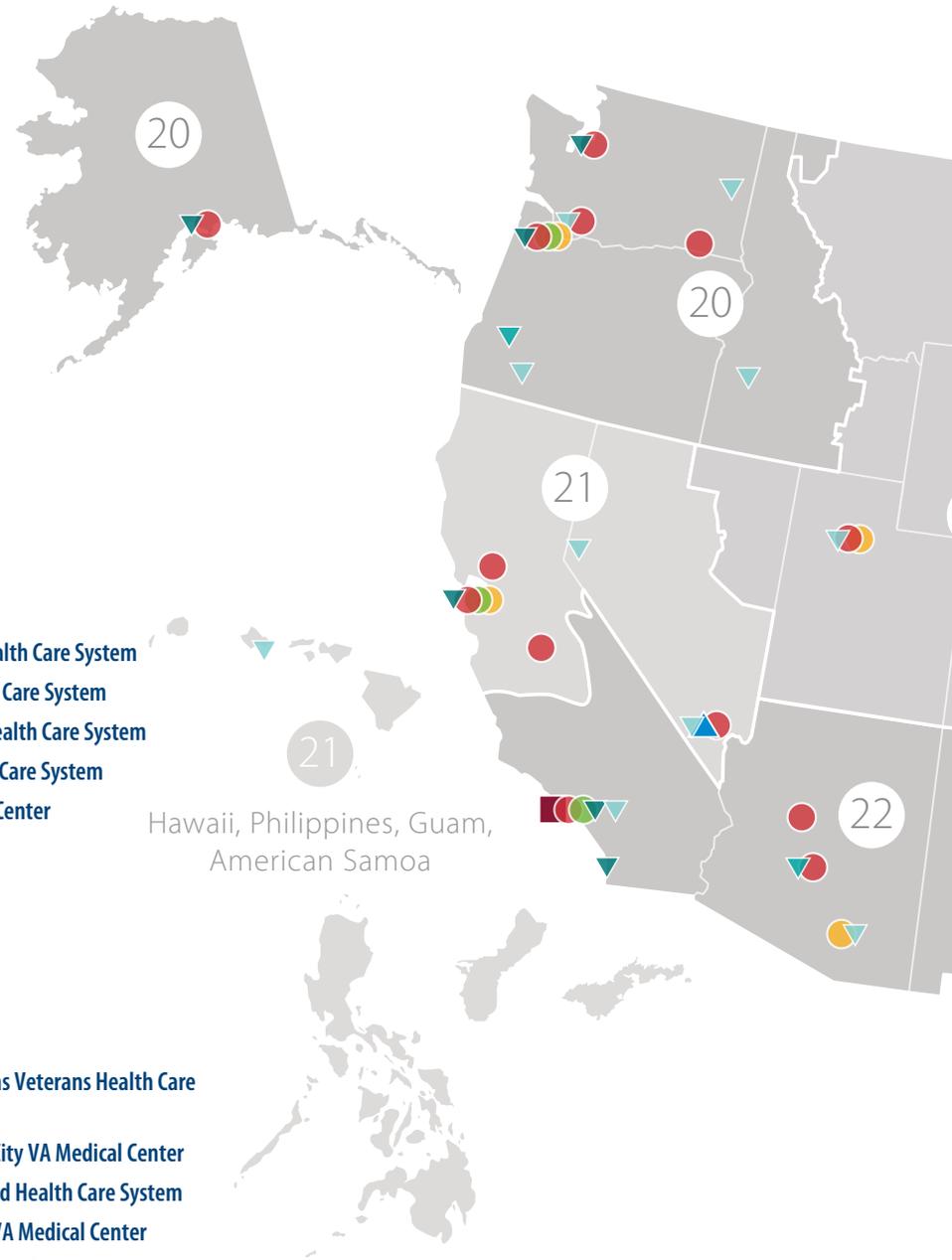
## 2017 Design Sites

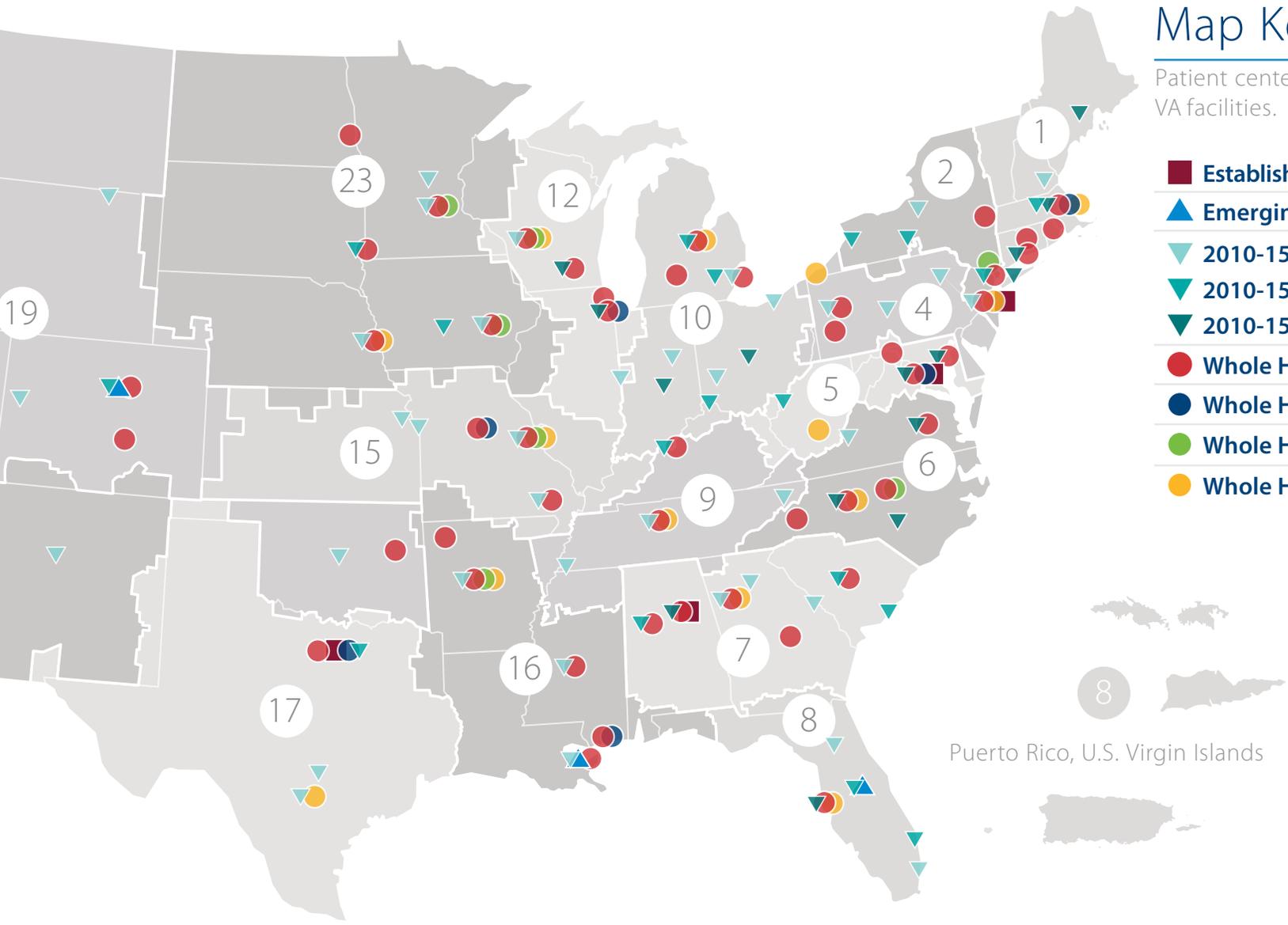
Baltimore VA Medical Center  
 Central Arkansas Health Care System  
 Durham VA Medical Center  
 VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System  
 VA Hudson Valley Health Care System  
 Iowa City VA Health Care System

VISN 8: Tampa VA Medical Center  
 VISN 9: Tennessee Valley Health Care System  
 VISN 10: Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center  
 (Saginaw, MI)  
 VISN 12: Tomah VA Medical Center  
 VISN 15: St. Louis VA Health Care System  
 VISN 16: Central Arkansas Veterans  
 Healthcare System (Little Rock, AR)

Minneapolis VA Health Care System  
 VA Portland Health Care System  
 San Francisco VA Health Care System  
 VA St. Louis Health Care System  
 Tomah VA Medical Center

VISN 17: South Texas Veterans Health Care  
 System  
 VISN 19: Salt Lake City VA Medical Center  
 VISN 20: VA Portland Health Care System  
 VISN 21: Palo Alto VA Medical Center  
 VISN 22: Tucson VA Medical Center  
 VISN 23: VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health  
 Care System (Omaha, NE)





# Map Key

Patient centered care activity at VA facilities.

- Established Centers of Innovation
- ▲ Emerging Centers of Innovation
- ▼ 2010-15 Innovation Grants: 1
- ▼ 2010-15 Innovation Grants: 2
- ▼ 2010-15 Innovation Grants: 3+
- Whole Health Education Locations
- Whole Health 2016 Design Sites
- Whole Health 2017 Design Sites
- Whole Health Flagship Sites

8  
Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands



*We want to make sure Veterans receive the support they need to achieve what is most important to them in life.*



*Your partnership is critical.  
Together we look forward to the future we will create!*

# Whole Health for Life

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs • 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420  
[www.va.gov/patientcenteredcare](http://www.va.gov/patientcenteredcare)

**VA**



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

Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Patient Centered Care and  
Cultural Transformation