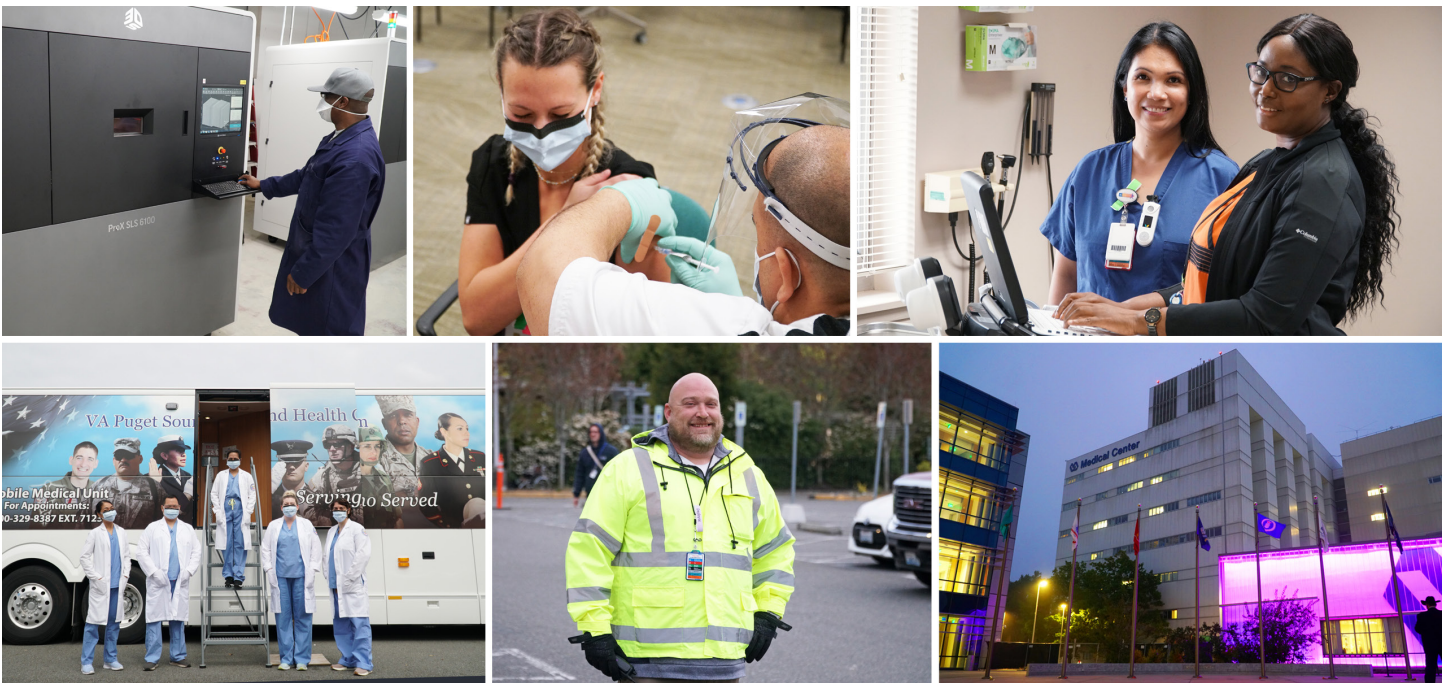


VA PUGET SOUND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM Annual Report



Fiscal Year **2020**



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Puget Sound Health Care System





“At VA Puget Sound Health Care System, our mission is to provide world-class care to improve the health and well-being of our nation’s Veterans, driven by a culture of innovation, collaboration, respect and learning.”

*Michael Tadych, FACHE
VA Puget Sound Health Care System Director*



“We’ve experienced growth in unique population in last 10 years while space essentially unchanged. To address the space constraints, we continue to invest in renovations and new construction projects to bring our facilities on par with the expert patient-centered care our VA Puget Sound has been delivering for almost 100 years.”

Kathryn Sherrill, MSW, LCSW, BSN
VA Puget Sound Health Care System Deputy Director



“We use data to improve the care we provide to patients, monitor use of important resources, and to identify novel ways to enhance the health of veterans and people around the globe.”

Catherine Kaminetzky, MD, MPH
VA Puget Sound Health Care System Chief of Staff



“Throughout VA Puget Sound Nursing Services, we are laser-focused on providing qualified, competent and compassionate care to those we care for.”

Geraldine L'Heureux, MBA, MHA, BSN, RN
VA Puget Sound Health Care System Deputy Director of Patient Care Services

“As we continue to press forward during this unprecedented pandemic, we commit to prioritizing the health and well-being of every Veteran we care for and the staff who care for them across all sites of care in our organization.”

Simon Kim, PhD
VA Puget Sound Health Care System Associate Director



“We continually strive to meet and exceed the expectations of our Veterans and their families.”

Connie Morantes, MD, FACP
VA Puget Sound Health Care System Deputy Chief of Staff



“Our compassionate and dedicated VA Puget Sound nursing staff helps ensure the best health outcomes for our Veterans.”

Pamela Popplewell, DPN, RN, ANP-BC
VA Puget Sound Health Care System Assistant Director of Patient Care Services







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SNAPSHOT

Patient
Population:
109,990

Patient
Growth:
-.05%
over last 2 years
(decreased by
half percent
compared to
2 years earlier)

Women
Veterans:
9.2%
growth over
2 years

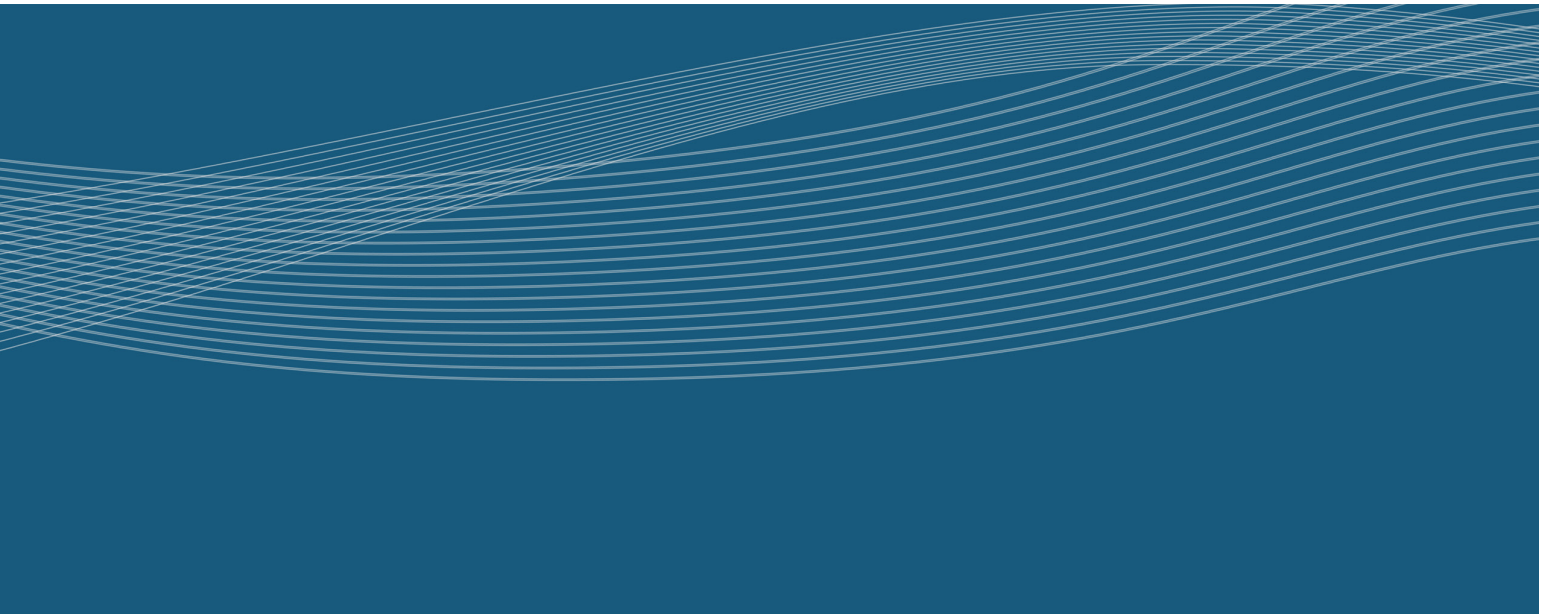
Admissions:
4,877
Average
Daily Census:
205

Operational Beds:
414

Bed Days of Care:
74,901

Surgeries
Performed:
2,894





Outpatient Visits: **937,283**

Seattle	–	522,764
American Lake	–	296,467
Mount Vernon	–	39,472
Silverdale	–	26,021
South Sound	–	14,089
North Olympic	–	11,902
Federal Way	–	9,892
North Seattle	–	8,177
Bellevue	–	6,746
Mobile Medical Unit	–	1,753



Expanding Access with Telehealth Services

28,709 Unique Telehealth Users

74,755 Encounters

5,521 Home Telehealth

61,346 Clinical Video Telehealth

7,888 Store and Forward Telehealth

27.5% of our patients who participated in at least one virtual care modality

167,077 Secure messages sent



Improving Health Outcomes through Clinical Research

Research and Development (R&D) continues to play a vital role in the Department of Veterans Affairs mission, and nowhere is this more evident than in the VA Puget Sound Health Care System. The R&D program – the 5th largest in the VA – reflects VA Puget Sound’s commitment to providing the highest quality care to its Veterans.

Currently we have over 700 active research projects. And our affiliation with the University of Washington School of Medicine and collaboration with Seattle Institute for Biomedical and Clinical Research (SIBCR) are integral to the ongoing discoveries that improve care to our Veterans.

Principal Investigators represent virtually every major clinical department, including traumatic brain injury, multiple blast exposures, memory improvement, Alzheimer’s

disease, post-traumatic stress disorder, deployment health, Parkinson’s disease, diabetes, cancer, substance abuse, lower limb prosthetics, genomics, and health services. This was expanded to include COVID-19 related research during the pandemic. Funding includes sponsors from VA, National Institutes of Health, Department of Defense, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, private industry and the non-profit sector.

The effects of a strong R&D program go well beyond recruitment of high-quality clinical staff. Patients at this institution have access to the latest pharmaceutical therapies and diagnostic techniques; the quality of "routine" care is enriched by the personal commitment of staff to increase their professional capabilities and to actively contribute to the advancement of their fields.

The Seattle Times, March 14, 2020: Seattle-area hospitals cancel elective procedures in response to coronavirus outbreak:

“This action is directly related to our efforts to effectively respond to COVID-19 care and prevention. We are also proactively contacting patients to offer them the options to convert clinic appointments to virtual ones,” said Tami Begasse, a spokesperson for the federal agency for veterans. “We are constantly evaluating options to ensure we are in the best position to manage the needs of the Veterans we are caring for during this public health crisis.”

7 Nationally Recognized Centers of Excellence:

VA Puget Sound has seven nationally recognized Centers of Excellence (in areas from limb-loss prevention and prosthetic engineering to primary care education and substance abuse treatment):

SPOTLIGHTS:

Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D) Seattle-Denver Center of Innovation for Veteran-Centered and Value-Driven Care

The mission of the HSR&D Center of Innovation (COIN) at VA Puget Sound is to conduct high-quality health services research that promotes Veteran-centered and value-driven care, generate and disseminate knowledge that contributes to the well-being of Veterans, work collaboratively with VA policy and operational leaders to implement research finding into clinical care, and train the next generation of health services research leaders. Research from COIN's 30 investigators have impacted VA policy and care delivery across a spectrum of primary, specialty and mental healthcare services. These impacts are solidified through partnerships with operational leaders and application of the National Academy of Medicine's Learning Health System. The COIN helps the VA become an efficient health care system where best practices and new knowledge are translated into clinical care. Highlights from 2020 work aimed at improving access, care delivery, and Veteran-centric health care innovations include:

Referral Coordination Initiative (RCI)

The RCI aims to redesign referrals by shifting the time-intensive task of triage to registered nurses, integrating and streamlining scheduling services, and coordinating specialist telehealth services across facilities. Through Dr. Lucas Donovan's work evaluating RCI in Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 20 sleep medicine from Fiscal Year 2018 through Fiscal Year 2020, we know that RCI reduces specialists' time spent on triage by 64 percent for every 1,000 referrals, which allows RCI specialists to complete 800 additional visits. Meanwhile, RCI simultaneously promotes care that is timelier and of high quality, cutting guideline discordant sleep testing in half. Using Dr. Donovan's work as a key proof of concept, the Office of Specialty Care and Office of Veterans Access to Care have partnered to improve specialty care delivery through a business model that can bridge geospatial and temporal barriers, serving as the basis for national dissemination of RCI through enterprise-wide suspense in January 2020.



Virtual Care QUERI

Led by Dr. John Fortney, Virtual Care (VC) QUERI supports our operational partners in the regional and national rollout of evidence-based practices that incorporate virtual care technologies in order to improve access to high quality care for rural Veterans in underperforming Community Based Outpatient Clinics. The evidence-based practices being adapted and deployed for virtual care are Measurement-Based Care and Written Exposure Therapy for PTSD. Over the next five years, the Office of Rural Health (ORH) will support two implementations projects being led by Virtual Care QUERI investigators. The ORH will work with VC QUERI to rapidly, rigorously deploy and evaluate technology-facilitated clinical interventions to enhance access and quality of care for rural Veterans.



TelePain

VA's National Pain Management, Opioid Safety, and Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PMOP) Office in the Office of Specialty Care Services has adopted TelePain as its national model for virtual pain care. VISN 20's TelePain program has delivered evidence-based, interdisciplinary pain care (especially non-pharmacological pain treatment) to 904 Veterans since it began in 2016. In 2020, PMOP selected TelePain as its national telehealth model. They are in the early stages of implementing TelePain hub-and-spoke programs in partnership with our team in VISN 20. Dr. Jessica Chen's work outlines the positive impacts of TelePain on patient access to specialty pain care, patient experience and satisfaction with TelePain clinical services, and provider engagement and satisfaction with the program.

Health Care Peer Support

Dr. Karin Nelson developed methods to recruit Veterans as peer health coaches to deliver health education and facilitate health care for Veteran patients living in communities with the highest rates of hypertension. Health care needs identified during health coaching sessions were integrated into VA Puget Sound Primary Care Clinic workflow to coordinate follow up care with clinic staff. Findings from this trial will inform future peer support programs targeted to provide community-based delivery of prevention services to patients in high-risk areas.

Implementation has the potential to increase the VA's reliance on community outreach and in-home services, thereby reducing the burden on clinical staff and services.

Palliative Care Intervention Pilot for Lung Cancer Patients

Dr. Lynn Reinke conducted a pilot study to test the feasibility and acceptability of a nurse-led, telephone-based palliative care intervention to improve the delivery of care for Veterans with newly diagnosed lung cancer. Lung cancer is the second most common cancer treated within the VA health care system and is the leading cause of cancer-related death among Veterans. Palliative care improves the quality of life for patients with problems associated with serious illness through the prevention and relief of suffering by early identification, assessment, and treatment of pain and other physical symptoms including psychological and spiritual needs. This innovative model of care is efficient and provides an alternative to traditional clinic-based outpatient palliative care without requiring new clinical infrastructure and practices. If the study demonstrates efficacy, the next step is widespread implementation of the nurse-led intervention across VA facilities.

Multiple Sclerosis Center of Excellence West

The Multiple Sclerosis Center of Excellence West (MSCoE West) is located at VA Puget Sound Health Care System and VA Portland Health Care System. It is one of two congressionally mandated Centers for MS in the country funded by VA Central Office. The Centers work together to further the understanding of MS and its impact on Veterans and ensure access to effective treatments to help manage MS and its associated symptoms.

MSCoE West is fortunate to partner with VA Puget Sound's MS regional program, a team nationally known for the development, testing and disseminating high quality, innovative clinical strategies to the field.

The regional program offers inpatient and outpatient interdisciplinary MS services through Rehabilitation Care Service and Neurology, collaborating closely with the Spinal Cord Injury and Disorders Service. The regional program provides comprehensive, interdisciplinary care for our 411 Veterans with MS, from diagnosis through the end of their life. Interdisciplinary teams, including MS nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, physiatry, recreational therapy, psychology and social work are at both the Seattle and American Lake campuses. Diagnostic, disease modifying therapies, symptomatic treatments, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, vocational services, community integration, specialty pharmacy, and whole health services are key elements. Specialty interdisciplinary services that focus on improving and maintaining mobility include spasticity management, bracing and wheelchair clinics.

MSCoE West has 19 MS regional programs and 49 support centers, anchored on four collaborative cores: clinical care, education, informatics and research.

The Seattle Times, Aug. 13, 2020: Rant and Rave

“RAVE to the VA Puget Sound Health Care System. Every staff member I have interacted with in the past six months has been professional, kind, supportive, helpful and understanding. I have never felt rushed during my appointments, and they took the time to answer all my questions. Bravo Zulu to the staff at the American Lake and Seattle campuses from this grateful veteran.”

Program highlights:

- VA health care professionals provided care to 13,898 Veterans with a confirmed diagnosis of MS through 125,968 encounters in Fiscal Year 2020, with a very high percentage of these encounters through telehealth.
- Completed Office of Rural Health MS Criteria for Use Telerehabilitation to Home Project at VA Puget Sound, providing physical therapy virtually to Veterans with MS. This program was well received by both Veterans and providers and resulted in savings of approximately \$19,000 dollars, 42,000 miles and 1,200 travel hours.
- Collaborated with National MS Society and Consortium of MS Centers on webinar series; developed a web-based educational presentation to support National Multiple Sclerosis Society's (NMSS) MS Navigator program that augments VA programs and resources including coordination of public and not-for-profit resources for patients and others affected by MS as well as through case management.
- Hosted the Seattle Collaborative Fellowship, a joint effort between the University of Washington and VA Puget Sound. This successful national program recruits competitive new investigators and provides them with knowledge and skills to serve as successful independent researchers in the field of MS rehabilitation research, ideally in the VA.
- Initiated tracking of Veterans with MS with confirmed COVID-19 at the onset of the disease in the Northwest and made formal linkages between the MS Surveillance Registry and VA National COVID-19 registry.
- Established a baseline of the multiple approaches used nationally for coding telehealth encounters during the pandemic to get a full picture of MS telehealth and overall clinical utilization during the pandemic.
- Continued progress on 33 active grants exceeding \$23 million in active funding, with three of these grants being for multi-site studies. Highlights of ongoing efforts include a pilot, multisite evaluation of the effectiveness the lipoic acid in MS on gait speed and brain atrophy funded by VA Office of Rehabilitation Research and Development as well as a pilot of chronic opioid use in MS, funded by NMSS.

On Forefront Of Innovation

As the largest integrated health care system in the country, the VA not only cares for our nation's heroes, but is in a unique position to advance change and positively disrupt the way America delivers health care. VA Puget Sound is part of the VHA Innovators Network, helping frontline employees develop innovative ideas and diffuse those ideas across the enterprise to provide superior care and the best health outcomes to our Veterans. VA Puget Sound also launched VA Ventures this summer (June 2020), the second "National Center for Innovation to Impact" in VA. VA Ventures will operate as an innovation incubator designed to promote early collaboration between VA, academia, start-ups and industry. Its mission is to drive health care innovations towards sustainable, high impact solutions, and ensure those innovations are delivered to VA patients first.

Program highlights:

- This year, VA Puget Sound Innovations staff dove into pandemic preparedness, partnering with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), National Institutes of Health (NIH) and America Makes to provide the general public with a curated list of 3D printable personal protective equipment (PPE) on the NIH 3D Print Exchange. VA Puget Sound staff helped test over 600 designs, approving 34 designs for clinical use and another 28 designs for community use. These designs are now being used across the world, with over 1.5 million design views worldwide.
- Early during the pandemic, face masks were in critically short supply. A VA Puget Sound team led by Chris Richburg (VA Ventures) designed the first ever 3D printed mask that met FDA emergency guidance criteria for surgical face masks and shared the design with the general public on the NIH 3D Print Exchange. VA Puget Sound surgery staff were essential in providing early feedback on the design.
- Puget Sound staff Joseph Iaquinto (Agile Design and Production Transformation site director and Center for Limb Loss and Mobility researcher), Arri Willis (Agile Design and Production Transformation product engineer) and Alex Berardo-Cates (Agile Design and Production Transformation product engineer) created a cleanable VA Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) hood with universal respirator compatibility out of non-medically competing materials, sourced from supply chains on U.S. soil. The hood recently received National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) approval and 6,000 hoods will be manufactured for clinical use. The first 100 were recently delivered to VA Puget Sound. Dr. Luis Tulloch-Palomino (infectious disease), Dr. Miriam Schwarz (hospitalist), Lisa Woodings (industrial hygiene) and Natina Dudley (emergency management and clinical practice coordinator) were key stakeholders in this project.
- When nasal swab shortages forced new manufacturers into the marketplace, there were no clear testing standards to assess their safety and efficacy. The FDA reached out to VA to help develop testing protocols. Puget Sound Innovations staff partnered with multiple front-line staff to develop and roll out the tests. Front line superstars included Janelle Lee (microbiology supervisor) and Archie Jugarap (dental technician), as well as the entire COVID-19 testing crew.
- Awarded a Joint Incentive Funded project for metal 3D printing; VA Puget Sound Health Care System is a leading resource for innovative 3D printing projects in the VHA. Improving health outcomes, reducing time in treatment and enhancing the patient experience through the continued use of 3D printing technologies in areas from pre-surgical planning to address diseases like cancer and heart failure and the creation of custom orthotics.
- Facilities Management Services staff, led by Dan Martin (chief, facilities management) and Jim Broyles (assistant chief, facilities management), rapidly converted basement space in the hospital to stand up a pop-up 3D printing manufacturing space, which can be utilized to make nasal swabs, face masks, and other critical supplies when supply chains are disrupted. Puget Sound is now registered with FDA as a medical device manufacturer—the first VA in the country to become a registered manufacturer of medical devices. Once fully operational, Puget Sound can manufacture up to 150,000 nasal swabs a month.
- Renovations will soon begin for 7,000 sq. ft. of manufacturing space within the Seattle Campus (basement of Building 1), and will house 17 3D printers across multiple technologies, including a titanium 3D printer, a bioprinter being used to create living, vascularized bone, and printers that will be used to make orthotics, prosthetics and surgical guides.



Expanded Care Through Regional Hubs

Along with caring for Veterans enrolled at one of our facilities, VA Puget Sound offers Veterans from a five-state area in the Pacific Northwest specialized care through its regional hubs:

Regional Amputation Center

Seattle VA's Regional Amputation Center (RAC) is one of seven hub sites in the VA's national Amputation System of Care, overseeing the care of Veterans with limb loss in VISNs 20 and 22. Seattle RAC is an interdisciplinary rehabilitation team of physicians, therapists, prosthetists, and administrative specialists who work closely with other clinical teams such as wound care, podiatry, and vascular surgery. Our mission is to provide excellent, state-of-the-art, holistic, interdisciplinary care to the Veteran with limb loss. We work with Veterans even before they have had an amputation when possible to help them understand the implications of amputation and prepare for amputation, and we provide lifelong rehabilitation care after amputation.

Program Highlights:

- Provides specialized care for highly complex cases in region.
- Houses an amputation rehabilitation fellowship to help grow the subspecialty of amputation rehabilitation. Graduates of the program have helped spread best practices in amputation rehabilitation to other VA facilities and to civilian health care systems.
- Provides education and support for other clinicians in region.
- Provides leadership for multiple national education and program development initiatives.



Fostering Ideas to Better Serve Veterans

Over the past year, VA Puget Sound has sought to accelerate and strengthen its core quality improvement mission by launching the Process Improvement (PI) Network to support and catalyze activities promoting higher quality care, more reliable operations, and a better experience for our Veterans. The PI Network deliverables have included a multitude of instructional guides, personalized coaching opportunities, training curricula, and an entirely revamped pathway for review and approval of improvement project proposals, cutting turnaround for this process from 49 days to eight days on average. These foundational structures have yielded dramatic results during the first year of their existence. Highlights include:

- Cataloging and continuously tracking 178 individual project threads representing an absolute gain of 96 works compared to the start of Fiscal Year 2020 (117 percent relative increase), at least 60 of which are from the beginning, rather than earlier projects just coming to awareness. At least seven peer-reviewed papers were published from these efforts, disseminating practices on length of stay reduction and suicide prevention to a broader audience both within and outside of VHA.
- Delivering 67 hours of personalized coaching to teams engaged in improvement efforts targeting nosocomial infection prevention, outpatient elder care, health care equity, and resident education to name but a few topics. Utilization of coaching services approached 110% of available appointments due to high interest necessitating frequent add-on sessions.

- Supporting and celebrating major institutional initiatives around COVID-19 including the 3D personal protective equipment (PPE) fabrication efforts and simulation sessions to rapidly train clinical staff and refine operations in anticipation of a possible caseload surge.

Beyond the PI Network, are the large-scale patient safety campaigns around delirium prevention, with protective orders now consistently applied to nearly 30 percent of all Emergency Department admissions (for comparison, the literature-reported incidence of in-hospital delirium is around 33 percent), and urgent interfacility transfer for patients presenting after-hours with ST-elevation myocardial infarction, a very serious type of heart attack during which one of the heart's major arteries is blocked. The latter project involved extensive collaboration with our academic affiliate, the University of Washington, and has so far aided 10 patients (roughly one per month) in obtaining life-saving cardiac catheterization within guideline-specified time goals. This initiative was nominated by VISN20 for a national VHA High Reliability Organization (HRO) HeRO award—the highest level of HRO recognition available within VHA and is reserved to honor employees who advance VHA's journey to high reliability through demonstration of VHA's HRO principles in action. The team is also maturing development of other projects such as the Daily Management System of tiered operational huddles intended to promote psychological safety, teamwork and problem-solving among frontline operational units.

Community Housing & Outreach Services Program and Justice Outreach



- Staff: 100+ full-time multi-disciplinary team members, including social workers, licensed professional mental health counselors, addiction counselors, physicians, psychiatrists, nurses, an occupational therapist, housing specialists, peer support specialists, and administrative support.
- Grant and Per Diem: Local grantees were awarded grants beginning on October 1, 2020 to offer transitional housing to homeless Veterans.
 - 7 Transitional housing programs offering all 5 models of care with a total of 186 beds
 - 1 Transition-in-Place housing program model with 20 units
- Emergency Housing: 2 Contracted Residential Services programs with a total of 22 beds.
- Drop-In Services: Seattle-based Community Resource & Referral Center (CRRC) offering short-term case management services and support.
- National Call Center for Homeless Veterans: Outreach social workers respond to calls, offering local information and resources to Veterans who are homeless or are at risk for homelessness.
- Hospital-based consults: Outreach social workers respond to consults initiated by VA providers, offering local information and resources to Veterans who identify as homeless during medical/mental health appointments.
- HUD-VASH: Approximately 2,400 HUD-VASH vouchers distributed by 12 public housing authorities in 11 counties.
 - The HUD-VASH program is exploring pilot programs with community partners to utilize vouchers in more creative ways. If approved by the VA Secretary, implementation should begin in Spring 2021.
- Veterans Justice Programs: 7 Veteran Treatment Courts across six counties.
- Naloxone Pilot Program: Homeless program Social Workers provided Opioid Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution Training to 179 Veterans.
- Access Clinic Pilot: The Social Work Service piloted an Access Clinic in American Lake to provide resources and information, including for homeless services, with a “warm hand-off” to VA providers, aiding Veterans in accessing services with a “no wrong door” approach.
- Suicide Prevention Collaboration: Homeless program social workers collaborate with Mental Health program’s suicide prevention coordinators to develop coordinated treatment plans for homeless Veterans most at risk for suicide.

Through our diversity and inclusion programs, VA Puget Sound is growing a diverse workforce and cultivating an inclusive work environment, where our staff are fully engaged and empowered to deliver the outstanding services to our nation’s Veterans and their families. Our programs include:

For Veterans:

- LGBT Program
- Women Veterans Health Committee

Staff:

- Hispanic Heritage
- Black Employment
- Disability
- Asian Pacific Islanders
- Native American
- Federally Employed Women
- LGBT
- Social Work Service has developed a staff-driven Diversity, Equity & Inclusion committee which promotes these practices within the workforce and in clinical practice.



Caring for Our Most Vulnerable Veterans During COVID-19

Those experiencing homelessness are some of our most vulnerable Veterans, and VA Puget Sound worked hard over this last year to protect them during the pandemic.

There was an early recognition at both the local and national level that the congregate nature of many homeless facilities and the high level of medical disability in our homeless population put them at very high risk for COVID-19. As a direct result of this recognition, we gained important new tools to care for our homeless Veterans. One of the most important of these was funding to move high-risk Veterans into hotel rooms. This meant that we were able to decompress our transitional housing (Grant Per Diem) programs and allowed our rapid rehousing program (Supportive Services for Veterans and Families) to get people to safety as quickly as possible. In addition to on-site case managers from our partners/grantees, our Homeless Patient Align Care Team (HPACT) visits the largest hotel sites each week to help ensure people are healthy and to advance their general care. We have also been able to broaden our eligibility for HUD-VASH vouchers, allowing us to more quickly move Veterans into permanent housing from these programs and hotels. Helping with all this, we've been able to provide smartphones to our Veterans in need, ensuring they can stay connected to housing case management and participate in virtual physical and mental health care.

We also created several other COVID-19-specific programs for this group of Veterans. First, we converted our American Lake domiciliary into our own isolation and quarantine facility. With meals, on-site nursing and supportive mental health care, this has allowed both homeless Veterans and

any Veteran without the home support they need to isolate in a place of safety. Second, we created a COVID-19 testing program that took testing to our transitional housing programs. Finally, we've taken the COVID-19 vaccine out to our hotels, transitional housing programs, and highest risk supportive housing buildings. As we finish up our second-dose vaccines at these places, we have transitioned into taking vaccines to our highest risk Veterans at their homes and those few in community shelters, people who would otherwise not make it to the hospital.

Partnership has been essential to all these efforts. This includes the incredible efforts of the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), which manages two of our largest transitional housing programs. The WDVA worked hard to minimize risk, coordinate testing and vaccines at these Washington State Soldiers Homes. Our other Grant Per Diem partners, like the Salvation Army and Catholic Community Services (CCS), for example, coordinated closely with us to carry out strong COVID-19 mitigation strategies and have prevented outbreaks. Together with CCS and the Young Women's Christian Association, VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families program successfully pivoted from rapid rehousing to providing meals and shelter at hotels, and now working with HUD-VASH vouchers. Even the local housing authorities, like King County Housing Authority, tore down paperwork barriers early in the pandemic, to help streamline getting our Veteran housed. Finally, working with CCS and Pioneer Human Services means that two new supportive housing buildings are opening, bringing 76 Veterans into homes of their own. Our case managers have been working incredibly hard to get people into these apartments.

Making Care More Convenient and Accessible

VA Puget Sound has experienced a 60 percent growth in unique population in last 10 years while space essentially remained unchanged. To address the space constraints and better serve Veterans where they are geographically located, we continue with facility renovations and new construction projects across our catchment area.

In December 2019, we opened a \$9.7 million, 15,000-square-foot Silverdale Community Based Outpatient Clinic that replaced our clinic in Bremerton. The team of approximately 50 providers and support staff care for approximately 6,000 enrolled Veterans (up from 4,400 in Bremerton) at the new, larger clinic. Services include primary care (in clinic and home-based), mental health, laboratory services, physical therapy, telehealth and social services. The central location in Silverdale is close to public transportation, making it convenient and accessible to eligible Veterans.

Also, in December 2019, we opened our \$4.3 million, 14,000 sq. ft. Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) in Georgetown. The 35-person CRRC team provides Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with one-stop access to community-based, multiagency services to promote permanent housing, health and mental health care, career development and access to VA and non-VA benefits. The Seattle Vet Center (Readjustment Counseling) is a community-based counseling center that provides a wide range of social and psychological services, including professional readjustment counseling to eligible Veterans, active duty service members, including National Guard and Reserve components, and their families.

VA Puget Sound also continues renovations to its American Lake campus to support expanded primary care, while optimizing its specialty care programs and services. And this comes on the heels of the opening our \$121 million Mental Health and Research Building in Seattle in March 2019.

Customer Experience

Ensuring our Veterans and their families are empowered to engage in their own whole health journey built on safe, timely and excellent quality care remains at the core of our mission at VA Puget Sound. We remain committed to doing everything possible to make VA Puget Sound the place our Veterans choose for their health care, and our patient advocates assisted almost 1,000 Veterans.

Quality Care

- The Joint Commission gold seal
- American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's Get With The Guidelines® Target: Stroke Gold Plus and Target: Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll quality achievement awards
- 7 CARF accredited programs
 - Blind Rehabilitation
 - Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center
 - Community Housing and Outreach Services
 - Employment Community Services – Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program
 - Mental Health Intensive Case Management
 - Pain Program
 - Rehabilitation Medical Rehabilitation
 - Spinal Cord Injury Unit
- Patient Aligned Care Team performance measures:
 - 34.15 percent of our Veterans see the same primary care provider each visit
 - 44 percent of Veteran visits received care by phone
 - 34.6 percent of same-day appointments
 - 81.93 percent of patients get an appointment within 7 days of their preference



Electronic Health Record Modernization

In May 2018, VA Puget Sound Health Care System and Mann-Grandstaff (Spokane) VA Medical Center were identified as the Initial Operating Capability (IOC) sites for the implementation of Cerner as our new Electronic Health Record (EHR) platform to help to ensure complete and accurate health records are shared seamlessly across VA, DoD, and community providers.

The EHR Modernization implementation project paused in April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, because VA staff across the country needed to focus on preparing their facilities, programs, and themselves for a COVID-19 surge. During the pause, some of the project work continued by Cerner and by VA staff who were able, mostly at the national level. Very limited work on the project resumed at VA Puget Sound in June 2020, and slowly ramped up in the fall, as some front-line staff were able to provide their critical perspectives and expertise. We are planning on re-engagement in January 2021, which will be necessary to prepare for the hoped-for go-live in September 2021. Mann-Grandstaff VAMC successfully went live with the Cerner EHR on October 24, 2020.

By being one of the first facilities to implement the new EHR, this is an exciting opportunity for VA Puget Sound to help shape the new modernized EHR for all of Veterans Health Administration. As part of the implementation team we will help refine the new EHR by capitalizing on lessons learned from Department of Defense, and now Mann-Grandstaff VAMC, which will help improve the roll-out process for all of VA.

Whether our staff members are in direct patient care or provide behind-the-scenes support, they all will play a part in facilitating the transition and the implementation of this new EHR. Like most change and innovation periods, this move will likely be frustrating. Members of the leadership team are working hard to ensure both staff and Veterans being served have what is needed to minimize disruptions during the transition.

The new EHR is another indication of the VA's commitment to transform this agency and ensure the best experiences for our Veterans now and in the future!



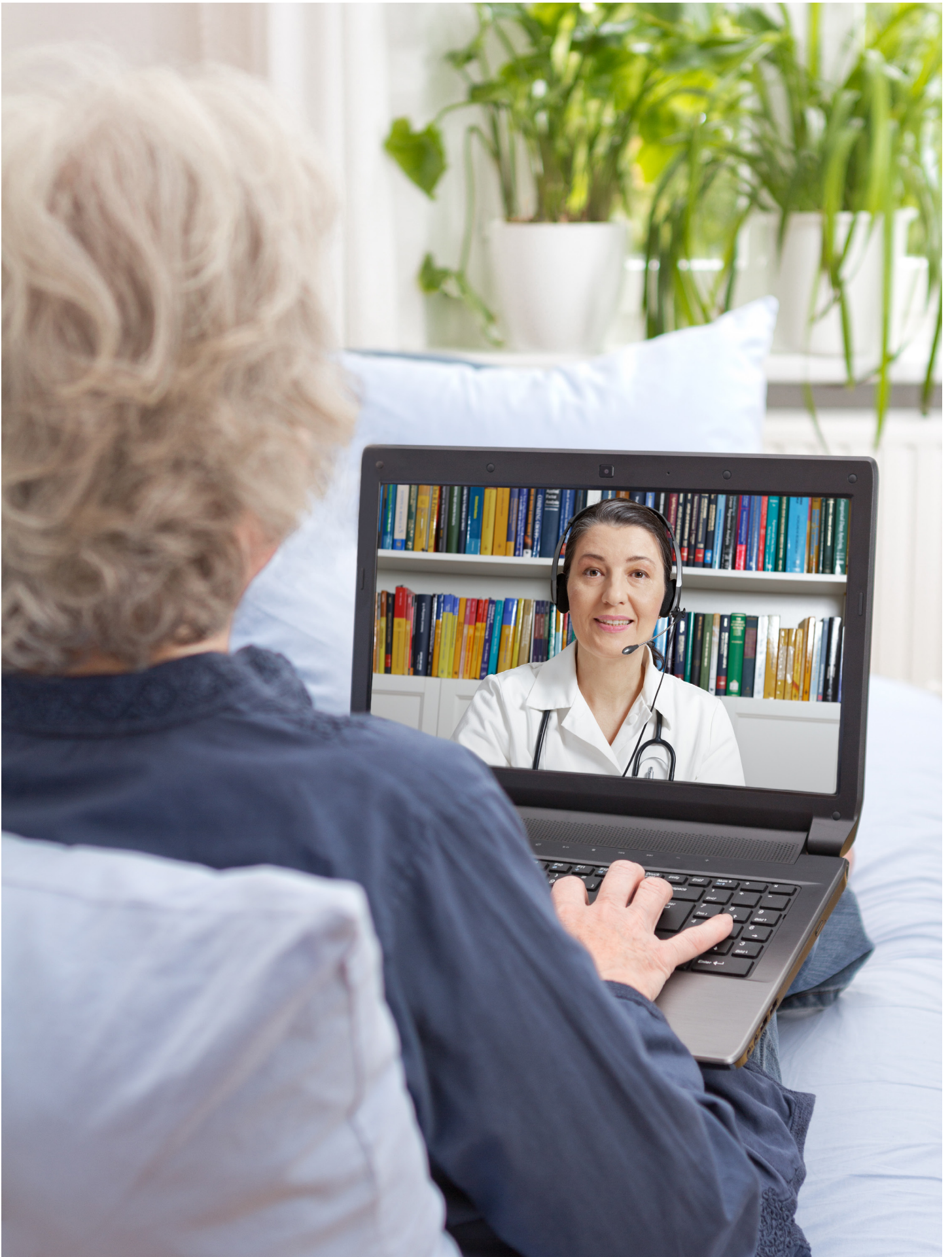
Women's Health

VA Puget Sound's Women's Health Program is the largest in VISN 20. For Fiscal Year 2020, 17,000 women Veterans were enrolled for care.

A team of over 60 women's health primary care providers deliver care across all nine of our facilities, with a least two women's health primary care providers at each location.

Comprehensive services by a multi-disciplinary team, including internal medicine physicians, gynecologists, mental health experts, social workers, pharmacists and nurses are provided at our Women's Health Clinics at Seattle and American Lake campuses.

We also have a robust network of community providers we partner with in care areas such as mammography, maternity, specialty breast care and infertility treatment (includes in vitro fertilization which must be related to a service-connected condition).



Mental Health and Suicide Prevention a Continued Priority

VA Puget Sound is committed to caring for both the physical and mental health care needs of our Veterans. In fiscal 2020, we supported more than 23,000 Veterans with almost 200,000 mental health care-related encounters. Additionally, our Suicide Prevention Team members annually assist approximately 2,700 Veterans, their families and their concerned friends located around the Puget Sound region.

Fiscal Year 2020 saw a massive shift in care delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, more than 90 percent of mental health visits are completed via telephone or televideo visits. Our rates of mental health appointments completed through the VA Video Connect platform increase by more than 2,000 percent in Fiscal Year 2020. Telehealth equipment with Internet access can be provided to Veterans as needed at no cost. We continue to provide in-person care to those Veterans who need it.

The COVID-19 pandemic also forced us to temporarily suspend our residential care offerings for mental health, but our providers pivoted to maximize intensive virtual treatment offerings for those Veterans who could benefit. We recognize this is not a perfect substitution for residential services and we look forward to being able to reopen these care offerings in Fiscal Year 2021.

We offer a wide array of services, including acute inpatient, ambulatory care programs, addictions treatment, emergency and urgent care and vocational rehabilitation services. Our mission is to provide an appropriate level of support and treatment to assist Veterans in recovery from mental health and addictive disorders and to maximize their overall level of function and satisfaction with life. Care is patient-focused, culturally sensitive, cost effective and supported by our clinical, education and research programs.

Clinical programs and services range from inpatient substance abuse detoxification (Seattle only) to evidence-based individual, family and group psychotherapy and evaluation and diagnosis of mental disorders (Seattle and American Lake campuses). Our primary care teams throughout our Community Based Outpatient Clinics are typically staffed by psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurse practitioners, nurses, technicians and peer support staff who work together to provide care for the patients in their programs.

Over the course of Fiscal Year 2020, VA Puget Sound received and responded to 2,764 referrals from the

Veteran's Crisis Line (VCL), a nearly 800 percent increase in Suicide Prevention Program utilization over the past decade. VA Puget Sound remains one of the top five sites, nationally, in terms of VCL referral volume, equating to nearly three times the national average. Approximately half of these calls come from the urban areas of King and Pierce counties, while the other half are from more rural locations across Western Washington. The Suicide Prevention team also has a mission of community outreach and education, as we strive toward a "no wrong door" approach to suicide prevention. The team completed an average of 17 outreach activities per month, many of which had to quickly shift to virtual formats in response to COVID-19. This resulted in education to—and contact with—5,927 individuals who are Veterans, or who are part of community agencies that serve Veterans.

VA Puget Sound's Suicide Prevention Team ensured that enhanced care was available to the more than 350 Veterans that were determined to be at especially high risk for suicide during the fiscal year. As a Veteran's risk subsided, these Veterans were provided with an additional 12 months of regular contact with caring greeting cards sent via the mail. This resulted in 254 cards sent to Veterans across the Puget Sound region, providing an additional path into continued care.

The Suicide Prevention Team is also committed to innovative and evidence-based approaches to reducing suicide risk. As a result, nearly 200 VA nurses, social workers, psychologists and physicians were trained on current best practices for suicide prevention, including risk identification, safety planning, and crisis intervention as part of a VA and State approved 6-hour continuing education training. In addition, researchers and Suicide Prevention staff have been engaged in projects related to:

- A roll out of the Advanced Safety Planning Intervention for suicide prevention.
- How to adapt safety planning to a socially distanced society as a result of COVID-19.
- Ensuring that VA's predictive analytics program, REACH VET, for at risk veterans has been fully implemented.
- Assessing the level of exposure and suicide prevention training that VA clinicians receive compared to community clinicians, in the hopes of identifying specific educational gaps that can be focused on as part of our teams' community outreach.



Pain Management/Opioid Reduction/Pain Telehealth

VA Puget Sound Health Care System Pain Clinics at its Seattle and American Lake locations provide comprehensive pain-care offerings to address complex chronic pain. Treatment options available to Veterans include co-disciplinary visits with a medical provider and psychologist simultaneously, pain skill groups, individual pain psychotherapy, complementary and alternative approaches, pain procedures, opioid tapering/medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), and intensive pain rehabilitation services through the outpatient and residential functional restoration programs.

Collaboration across VA Puget Sound clinics and specialties is an important tenet of both comprehensive pain care and opioid safety, including the Opioid Safety Review Board, Opioid Safety Program, and Stepped Care for Opioid Use Disorder, Train the Trainer (SCOUTT) Initiative program. In addition, the clinic has emphasized provider education through the Pain Mini-Residency program, pain/anesthesia residency and fellowship programs, pain psychology internship and fellowship, and social-work training program.

Program highlights:

- VISN 20 TelePain Program rolled out to VA Health Care Systems in Roseburg, White City and Anchorage as well as their respective Community Based Outpatient Clinics. For VA Puget Sound, the program resulted in high patient satisfaction and improved access to care.
- Within weeks of the pandemic that reduced in-person care to emergent only, VA Puget Sound quickly transitioned care to telehealth-to-home, using VA Video Connect (VVC). From March 2020 to July 2020 there were 1,737 VVC patient encounters, including both Pain Clinic and TelePain. And Puget Sound delivered 94% of VISN 20's telehealth pain care in the fiscal year.
- New workflows improved clinical coverage, eConsult response and VISN 20 TelePain consult management.
- Multiple quality improvement projects were completed, such as improving opioid prescribing safety, mindfulness and measurement-based pain care.
- Staff conducted numerous funded research projects, such as: Integrated treatment for chronic pain and opioid use disorder and the chronic low back pain radiofrequency ablation pilot trial. Additionally, VA Puget Sound was awarded \$45,000 in Comprehensive Addiction & Recovery Act funds for equipment and training, and \$80,000 from national VA.
- Stratification Tool for Opioid Risk Mitigation (STORM) to support very high-risk Veterans treated with opioids
- Non-visit consults completed (235 completed during Fiscal Year 2020, quarters two through four) with pain recommendations provided both within the facility and for other sites within the VISN (primarily Alaska).



Fisher House – A Home Away from Home

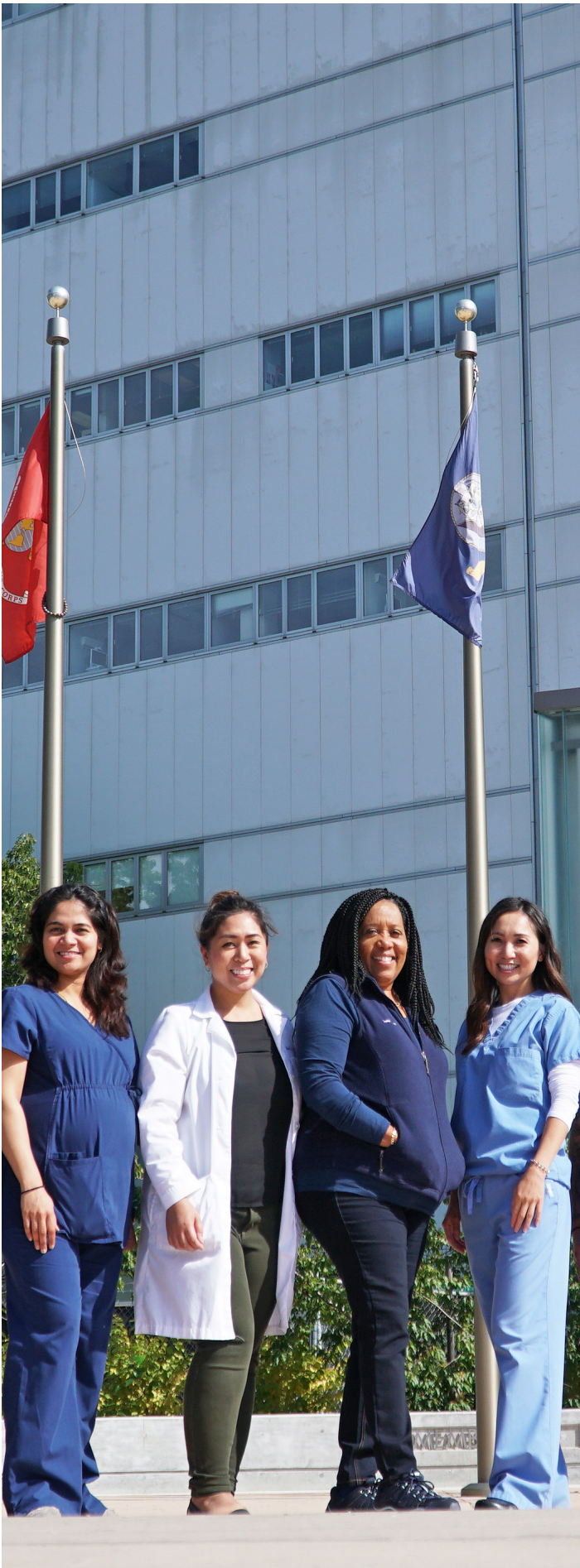
Volunteers a Critical Part of Our Team

VA Puget Sound's Fisher House continues to provide Veteran and active duty military families and caregivers housing near their loved one while they are hospitalized for an illness, disease or injury, at no cost to them. Along with offering a home away from home, the Fisher House team works with other VA Puget Sound support groups, such as social work, to remove the complexities of care so our guests can concentrate on their loved ones who are hospitalized. Guests of the Fisher House have come from 48 states around the nation, and 14 countries around the globe. VA Puget Sound specialty services, such as Spinal Cord Injury, expand our footprint of care across five states, helping those needing to feel at home. Program highlights:

- 8,196 families served
- 11,945 house guests
- 69,381 nights stayed
- Average length of stay was 11 nights
- More than \$12 million savings in hotel expenses for families

During Fiscal Year 2020 alone, VA Puget Sound Voluntary Service provided oversight to more than 650 volunteers at both VA Puget Sound and the Tahoma National Cemetery. Our volunteers delivered nearly 34,000 hours of supplemental and support service; the equivalent totaling nearly \$1 million. Voluntary Service also received more than \$465,000 in monetary and non-monetary donations. Together these volunteer hours and community partner donations equaled nearly \$1.5 million for the direct benefit of our Veterans.

Voluntary Service is really about volunteers and community partners striving to enhance the experience of our Veterans. Whether it's our Red Coat Ambassadors greeting and assisting new arrivals on campus, providing travel vouchers and gift cards for homeless and at-risk Veterans through social work, funding community reentry outings for rehabilitation patients, providing Veterans transportation to medical appointments, or delivering military honors at the Tahoma National Cemetery, VA Puget Sound Voluntary Service is an integral part of the mission to serve our Veterans in the Pacific Northwest.



Nurturing Our Nation's Future Medical Professionals

As a teaching hospital, VA Puget Sound provides a full range of services, with state-of-the-art technology as well as education and research. Our academic partners play an invaluable role in driving innovation and collaborative research to improve health outcomes for not only the Veterans entrusted to us, but to help people worldwide.

VA Puget Sound began partnering with the University of Washington School of Medicine in 1951, primarily in the fields of medical, dental, nursing, mental health and social work. These future professionals are the nation's health care workforce pipeline who will go on to care for Veterans and other patients in urban and rural communities across the U.S.

VA Puget Sound takes pride in our 70-year history of positive advancements and cutting-edge academic partnership and achievements that continue to improve health outcomes for the Veterans we care for. Our academic collaborations build on our passion to learn and power to heal.

Each year, VA Puget Sound trains an average of 1,700 health care professionals annually—from physicians and nurses to social workers and psychologists. Through its more than 150 active associated health, graduate medical education, nursing undergraduate, graduate and research affiliations in Pacific Northwest and beyond, VA Puget Sound offers innovation and progressive training. And its collaborations with the University of Washington School of Medicine and Seattle Institute for Biomedical and Clinical Research are integral to ongoing discoveries.

During the pandemic, VA facilities such as VA Puget Sound worked with medical schools and programs across the country to utilize health professions trainees to care for Veterans virtually and in-person while completing their training requirements. The number of physician residents training across the VA increased by more than 2,000 and, according to the American Association of Medical Colleges, applications to medical schools have increased by 18 percent for the upcoming 2021 academic year.



COVID-19 Response

COVID-19 Emergency Operation Command (EOC) implemented daily evaluation of risk, transmission, and prevention strategies, rapid COVID-19 testing (Veteran and employee); implemented access to care strategies, increasing use of tele-modalities by more than 400 percent. Established standard operating procedures for surveillance (screened 10,800 Veterans/employees, tested 8,600 Veterans, 2,050 employees). Developed novel daily electronic COVID-19 surveillance, reporting resources to support incremental review of patients and return of ambulatory care operations.

VA Puget Sound's COVID-19 response efforts included leading the nation in telehealth services through increasing encounters by almost 600 percent in Fiscal Year 2020 (from 13,742 to 94,620) as compared to the prior year. It was selected as one of the first 37 VA sites to provide COVID-19 vaccines. Additionally, VA Puget Sound broadened its 3D Printing program to include the creation of face masks, shields and other personal protective equipment to meet demand, demonstrating the unique benefits its partnerships provide to not only Veterans, but the broader communities.

The EOC shared resources on communication plans, infection prevention strategies, staffing and surge capacity analyses and strategies, COVID-19 testing, Veteran and staff screening methodologies, and electronic surveillance with VISN 20 health care facilities and VHA Nationally. Staff Lunch & Learns were also initiated to empower staff with timely information about our response. VA Puget Sound also shared recovery plans and resources with VISN 20,

supported ongoing external communication (e.g., printed quarterly newsletter, GovDelivery, website, press releases, operational updates, legislative and key stakeholder outreach) to more than 100,000 Veterans on the Way Forward strategies, and promoted use of tele-modalities to ensure care delivery.

Developed and implemented COVID-19 Surveillance Dashboard in using the local facility's novel use of health factors, including stop-light guardrails to interpret key surveillance measures. Surveillance includes tracking of triage, testing, outpatient and inpatient care, tracking potentially exposed staff, patient notification of lab results, epidemiologic trends, demographics and many other topics. VA Puget Sound presented twice nationally, demonstrating dashboard and concepts important for outbreak management and shared key design concepts with five VISNs.

Pathology and laboratory medicine began testing for COVID-19 in-house beginning March 30, 2020. Improved turnaround time from 47 hours when sending out tests to 19 hours using our lab.

Provided medical swabs to conduct COVID testing of residents at (2) local VA homes and performed COVID testing for all their employees and residents at the Seattle Lab facility.

Developed a 3D-N95 mask, protocol and production-house. This a novel approach to address PPE supply and demand needs of the facility, VISN and national.



AWARD-WINNING STAFF

Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal Awardee

Dr. Beth Ripley, VA Puget Sound Health Care System radiologist, chair of the VA's advisory panel on 3D printing, VHA 3D Printing Advisory Committee chair and University of Washington assistant professor of radiology was honored as a 2020 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal awardee in Science and Environment. Dr. Ripley has spent the past four years bringing 3D printing solutions to Veterans through the creation of the VHA 3D printing network. Since that time, her collaborative efforts to diffuse emerging technologies throughout the VA serve as the catalyst behind countless innovations driven by her colleagues. VA Puget Sound staff are using virtual reality software to help patients with post-traumatic stress through immersion treatment and 3D printed custom-designed dental crowns are now being created for hundreds of Veterans. Medical imaging coupled with 3D printing is actively being used in surgical planning to support less invasive treatment strategies for diseases like cancer and heart failure. 3D printed hand braces, custom-designed for each patient, allow increased function, for example helping an active father get back to picking up his baby girl and gardening.

"Dr. Beth Ripley embodies the spirit of the Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medals with her strong commitment to public service and her creation of the VA's innovative 3D printing network that is improving healthcare for veterans throughout the country," said Max Stier, president and CEO of the nonprofit Partnership for Public Service. "Dr. Ripley's work also has proven to be invaluable during the current COVID-19 crisis with the VA's 3D printing system now being used to develop safety equipment for front-line health care workers."

Federal Health Innovation & Technology (FedHealthIT) Awards

Receiving a 2020 FedHealthIT Innovation Award, Dr. Jeffrey Heckman, VA Puget Sound's Regional Amputation Center medical director was recognized for his work – FLOW3 – to provide Veterans with prosthetics faster and more accurately than ever before. The practice was designed and implemented by Dr. Heckman and his collaborators at VA Eastern Colorado in Denver. FLOW3 is a novel workflow computerized management system that incorporates three custom-designed applications to facilitate the process for obtaining prosthetic limbs for Veterans. While the changes and advances in the process implemented by FLOW3 are mostly invisible, the results show that through the new workflow management system, approximately 4,000 Veteran lives have been impacted by providing complete prostheses or socket replacements. Veterans were able to receive their prosthetics as quickly as possible because the average time of delivery was reduced by 15 days.

**Seattle Business Magazine, March 2020:
Seattle Business Magazine's 2020 Leaders
in Healthcare Awards**

*"Gold Award: PharmID and Silver Award: UW
Medicine and VA Puget Sound Health Care
System; Adaptive Biotechnologies"*



AWARD-WINNING STAFF

Paralyzed Veterans of America, Northwest Chapter Awards

Dr. Steven Kahn is the 2020 Recipient of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, NW Chapter Larry Searle Lifetime Achievement Award for VA Research for his innovative leadership and lifetime achievement in diabetes research to improve the lives of our Veterans, our nation and the world. As a VA Puget Sound staff physician and researcher since 1988 and associate chief of staff for research from 2001 to 2009, Dr. Kahn's history of award-winning research has transformed our understanding of prediabetes and type 2 diabetes. Kahn has received numerous awards for his research, including the European Association for the Study of Diabetes' Claude Bernard Medal Endocrine Society Clinical Investigator Award, Department of Veterans Affairs John B. Barnwell Award, European Association for the Study of Diabetes Albert Renold Award and American Diabetes Association Outstanding Achievement in Clinical Diabetes Research Award.

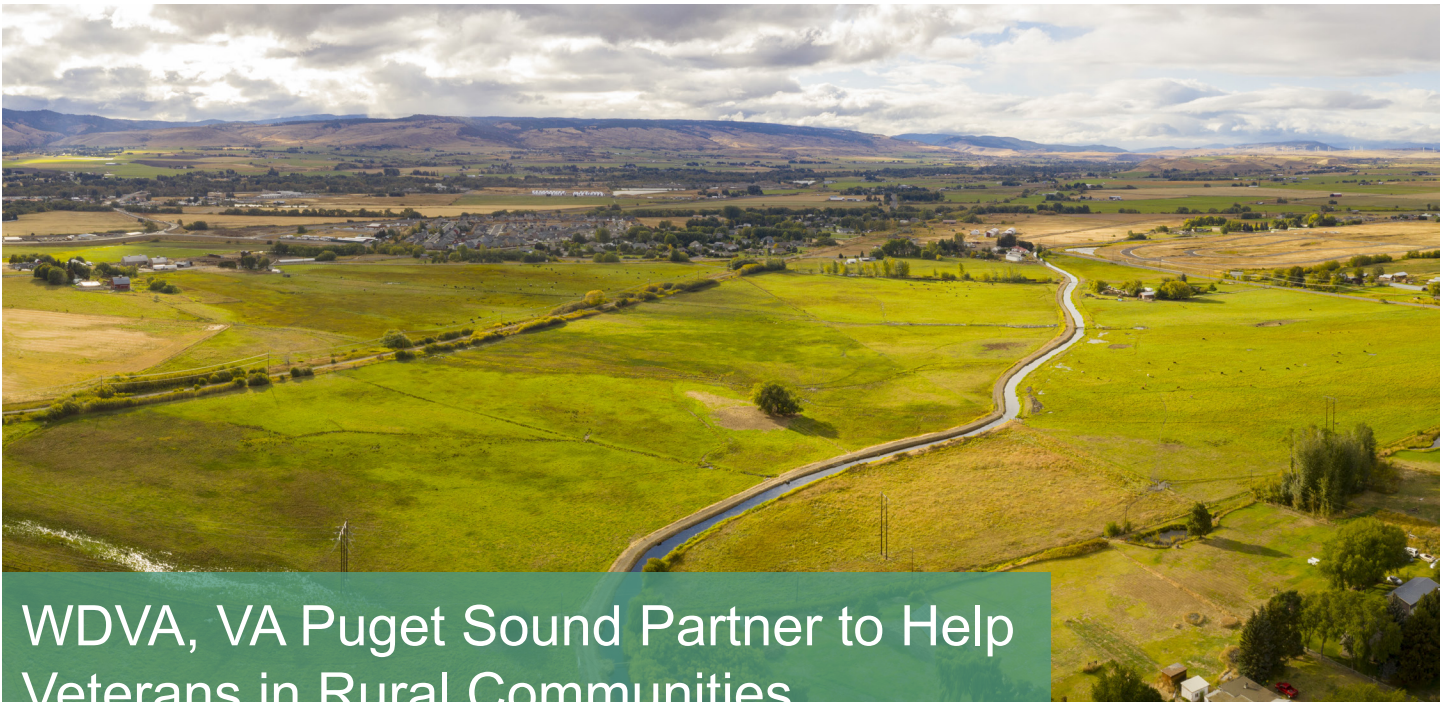
Dr. Mark Hamblin, who recently retired from his role as staff physician for VA Puget Sound's Mental Health Clinic, is the 2020 Recipient of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, NW Chapter, Jack Michaels 2020 Award for Excellence in VA Research. Dr. Hamblin was honored for his 30 years as a staff physician, along with his 17 years on the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee. The IRB is charged with the protection of human subjects in research by ensuring the research is conducted in a safe, equitable and compliant manner.

"Physicians like Drs. Steven Kahn and Mark Hamblin are critical to the groundbreaking research and innovative care needed for our Veterans who experience spinal cord injury or disease," said Brent King, executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of American Northwest Chapter. "And VA Puget Sound's Research and Development program continues transforming health care and enhancing the quality of life for Veterans everywhere."

VA Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development Service.2020 William S. Middleton Award

Dr. Stephen Plymate, an endocrinologist at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System and associate director of the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center, received the 2020 William S. Middleton Award. It is the highest honor conferred by the VA Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development Service. The Middleton Award recognizes Dr. Plymate's groundbreaking contributions to VA research, particularly the field of prostate cancer and its treatment. Prostate cancer is the second most common cancer among men and the leading cause of male cancer deaths. For over 28 years, Plymate has worked to help clinicians better understand which patients will respond to specific prostate cancer treatments, and to develop new drug therapies.

"Dr. Plymate's work has made a significant, real-world impact in an area that is especially relevant to Veterans' health," said Dr. Rachel Ramoni, VA chief research and development officer. "His work confirms VA's commitment to excellence in research and treatment of diseases affecting Veterans and patients worldwide."



WDVA, VA Puget Sound Partner to Help Veterans in Rural Communities

Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) and VA Puget Sound Health Care System announced October 24, 2019, its collaborative pilot program, called Veterans in Agriculture. The program is aimed at improving Veteran's behavioral and mental health care needs through agriculture training in rural communities.

"Our thanks go to the Veterans Health Administration and VA Puget Sound Health Care System for partnering with us to enhance mental health access and suicide prevention for rural veterans and their families," said Lourdes "Alfie" Alvarado-Ramos, WDVA director. "Helping rural veterans make connections to their earned benefits will make them more resilient and ultimately able to sustain employment leading to healthier lives for themselves and their families."

Washington State is home to over 112,000 rural veterans. In rural areas, Veterans face high unemployment rates, with fewer employment, training and transportation options as compared to those offered in urban areas.

Through the \$621,000 Veterans in Agriculture grant from VA Puget Sound, WDVA will bring together regional partners to support the state's Veteran population with training services in agriculture vocations as well as behavioral and mental health services. Under the program, WDVA and its community partners will provide equipment, tools, materials and supplies for hands-on projects and will also provide the training personnel, curriculum, classroom materials, IT equipment and supplies for the classroom training. Ongoing agricultural engagement activities including an Agricultural Job Fair, pop-up Farmer's Markets, and agricultural partnerships throughout the year.

"Ensuring the mental health care needs of our Veterans requires our whole community to combine forces and make focused investments. Every step we take to advance that goal, is a step in the right direction," said Michael Tadych, VA Puget Sound director. "Partnering with Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs on this pilot underscores our commitment to grassroot partnerships at all levels to ensure we keep the needs of our veterans—our nation's heroes—front and center.

Fortune Business Insights (via GlobeNewswire), Oct. 16, 2020: Insights [2020-2026] 3D Printing Medical Devices Market Size, Share, Analysis, Trends, Growth, Revenue, Competitive Landscape, Forecast Report:

"The global 3D printing medical devices market is poised for rapid expansion as market players look to maintain their competitive edge. This is being done through innovative product development and collaborations. For example, recently, the US-based company, UNYQ, launched a 3D printed prosthetic leg socket called UNYQ Socket. In 2018, General Electric and VA Puget Sound Health Care System partnered to develop advanced 3D printed materials for US veterans."



VA Puget Sound Staff Support of COVID-19 Hot Zones

While most people can't fathom flying to a COVID-19 hot zone, dozens of VA Puget Sound Health Care System staff volunteered to do just that under the VA's Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS). VA Puget Sound sent physicians and nurses for short-term deployments to sister facilities in areas surging with COVID-19 (New York, New Jersey, Washington State) and the U.S. Naval Hospital Ship Mercy (T-AH 19). While each person's contributions were unique, the one thing they had in common was they all said they'd absolutely do it again.

As the largest integrated health care system in the nation with 1,255 facilities, the VA is uniquely positioned to help in other areas that may be overwhelmed during disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and yes, the coronavirus pandemic. While enrollment for VA medical staff is mandatory, participation is voluntary. Generally, needs are focused on health care personnel as well as medical supplies and equipment.

On April 11, 2020—with a 12-hour notice—VA Puget Sound Health Care System Urgent Care Nurse Joanie Ward deployed to Bronx, New York to James J. Peters VA Medical Center's Emergency Department.

"To see an entire ICU where every Veteran was vented [on ventilation] was tough," Ward, who has been with VA the past five years, emotionally recalled. "This is real. These are real people. They're parents, husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, their someone's kid. It was very heart breaking. At the same time, it was an honor to serve the nurses, and the doctors and all the Veterans...just to be there as a support. The appreciation they gave us was very humbling."

Pulmonary Critical Care Physician Dr. Jeffrey Edelman was deployed to VA New Jersey Health Care System's East Orange Campus from April 19 through May 2. With the VA since 2013, Edelman expected to see things quite chaotic based on news coverage about the surge in the New York and New Jersey area.

"One of the greatest resources of this organization [the VA] is its people. And no matter where you go in this system, the work ethic is quite similar," said Dr. Edelman. "I saw quite a bit of teamwork and self-sacrifice and putting oneself at risk day after day. Everyone was really in this together."

Critical Care Physician and Nephrologist Dr. Sarah Sanghavi deployed to VA New York Harbor in Brooklyn. From April 13 through April 27, she worked exclusively in the Intensive Care Unit caring for the most critically ill patients. Prior to joining VA two years ago, Dr. Sanghavi was in private practice.

"We were actually very lucky to have enough ventilators, dialysis machines and personal protective equipment," Dr. Sanghavi said. "Our main resource shortage was human resources, including nurses and respiratory therapists. I appreciated that the VA infrastructure allowed for appropriate allocation and prompt mobilization of human resources."



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Puget Sound Health Care System

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