

# Central Blind Rehabilitation Center

## Annual Perspective 2021

### PROUDLY SERVING THE CENTRAL AREA REGION

Much like 2020, the year 2021 presented many challenges. Continuing to serve our blinded and visually impaired Veterans within the limitations of the COVID 19 pandemic was no small task. While we resumed inpatient care in January 2021, restrictions due to the ongoing pandemic limited program options including the number of inpatients we maintained, and outings into the community remained suspended. Despite these challenges, we still managed to:

- ◆ Expand VA Virtual Care options to include Recreation Therapy
- ◆ Achieve Commission for the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) reaccreditation through 2024
- ◆ Admit 130 Veterans for inpatient blind rehabilitation
- ◆ Served 315 Veterans through VA Virtual Care (VVC)
- ◆ Treated 323 Low Vision Outpatients
  - ◇ 172 return Veterans ◇ 151 new Veterans
- ◆ Maintained Fall Prevention practices within our outcomes target



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### 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

- CARF Re-accreditation
- Access to care; resumption of Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Services
- Expanded VA Virtual Care Services

## ANNUAL STATISTICS 2021

### Access to Care

In compliance with the Mission Act of 2019, Blind Centers across the nation strive to admit Veterans within 28 days of receipt of their application referral for blind rehabilitation.

Program	Discharges	Average Wait Time	Length of Stay
Inpatient	119	42 days	21 days
VVC (VA Virtual Care)	315	9 days	N/A
Outpatient	31	N/A	N/A

### Blind Rehabilitation Programs

Inpatient Program	Explanation	Number of Discharges
Regular Blind Rehabilitation	Basic core blind rehabilitation in 5 skill areas	37
Computer Access Training (CATs)	Training in the use of adaptive access software	23
Single Area	Refresher programs or technology specific; iOS, Orcam, etc.	6
Dual Blind Rehabilitation	Combination of both basic core rehabilitation and computer access technology	53
Telehealth (VVC)	VA Virtual Care (VVC) Direct patient care via virtual modality	315
Outpatient Services		Number of Veterans Served
Low Vision Clinic	172 Return Veterans 151 New Veterans	323
Outpatient Blind Rehabilitation	Temporary Services in lieu of Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Suspended as of June 18, 2021	31
Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Services Rural Health	Outpatient Blind Rehabilitation services 100 mile radius of Hines VA	166
Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Services Polytrauma	Services for Veterans suffering from acquired brain injuries	211

## ANNUAL STATISTICS 2021 CONT.

### **Age Range**

Veterans seeking blind rehabilitation services range between ages 20-100 with 71 being the average age.

Age Range	Number of Veterans
20s	6
30s	6
40s	14
50s	53
60s	119
70s	169
80s	71
90s	25
100s	2

### **Common Eye Diagnoses**

Blindness and visual impairment can present in a number of modalities. Below are the most prevalent eye diagnoses found in Veterans seeking blind rehabilitation. Some Veterans have more than one diagnosis. Glaucoma and Macular Degeneration continue to be the most prevalent eye diagnoses. Optic Nerve Disease, Retinal Detachment, and Histoplasmosis and Stroke occurred in 3% or less of discharges.

Diagnosis	Number of Diagnoses
Glaucoma	133
Macular Degeneration	116
Diabetic Retinopathy	67
Other	66
Optic Atrophy	49
Retinitis Pigmentosa	31
Cataract	26
Head Trauma	20

### **Common Medical Diagnoses**

Diabetes and Psychological diagnosis are the most prevalent among Veterans seeking blind rehabilitation.

## PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT GOALS

The Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) Performance Improvement Plan was in alignment with VA National Blind Rehabilitation key performance measures and Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital strategic map in addressing Veteran and customer satisfaction, as well as improving the customer experience.

The 2021 goals  
focused on:

- ◆ Access To Care
- ◆ Safety
- ◆ Satisfaction

## GOALS

### **Goal 1: Improve Access to Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation-Decrease Wait Time**

We continue to strive to meet the 28 day turnaround for admission to the Blind Rehabilitation inpatient program. Due to the COVID Pandemic, the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center began the 2021 fiscal year (October 1, 2020) providing care to Veterans through virtual and outpatient services only. On January 26, 2021, the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center welcomed their first inpatient in eight months. Although Central Blind Rehabilitation Center is a thirty-four bed facility, the center has been operating at a reduced capacity to increase social distancing and keep our Veterans and staff safe from COVID-19. With the reduced bed count, the Blind Rehabilitation Center served 119 Veterans in the inpatient program for the fiscal year (October 1, 2020-September 30, 2021). However, more of these Veterans were admitted within 28 days compared to fiscal year 2020, with 35% of admissions in 2021 within the 28 day mandate established by National VA Blind Rehabilitation Service, compared to 2020 at 14%.

### **Goal 2: Improve Access to Care Utilizing VA Virtual Care (VVC)**

VVC continues to grow in popularity as an additional option for Veteran care in the home setting, especially during the COVID 19 pandemic that presented many barriers to the traditional model of in-person services.

This past year saw an increase in sessions provided to Veterans totaling 315 VVC blind rehabilitation programs. This was over a 55% increase from fiscal year 2020.

We continue to identify strengths, weaknesses, and trends impacting the success of VVC Training at the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center. Through this process we continue to identify best practices, equipment needs and space modifications to further enhance VVC programming.

## GOALS CONT.

### **Goal 3: Increase Veteran Satisfaction-uSPEQ**

Maintaining Veteran satisfaction is ongoing. The National Veteran Experience Survey, also known as uSPEQ, is one of many modalities we use to measure satisfaction of our Veteran population. Historically, we have maintained 90-100 percentile. In 2021, satisfaction survey data included January through September 2021. We averaged satisfaction in the upper 90 percentile for the year. Additionally, a new exit interview has been implemented to allow for more specific measurable feedback on the program at the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center for the 2022 performance year.

### **Goal 4: Patient Safety Fall Prevention**

Veteran safety is also an ongoing initiative. Given the fact that our Veteran population is already at higher risk due to blindness and visual impairment, blind center staff, including nursing personnel, continue efforts to decrease the falls by increasing awareness of fall assessment scores, maintaining fall prevention education, and monitoring trends and responding to falls with action plans. The Central Blind Rehabilitation Center met this goal to reduce falls by 25% last year.

Needless to say, fall prevention and further reducing falls and fall risks will continue in 2022. Facility modifications are on schedule to be completed in 2022 to include bathroom renovations in each Veteran room.

## PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT GOALS CONT.

Goals for 2022 will continue to focus on:

- ◆ Access To Care
- ◆ Virtual Care (VVC)
- ◆ Stakeholder Satisfaction
- ◆ Safety
- ◆ Family Education
- ◆ Whole Health Modalities

## WHOLE HEALTH FOR LIFE

Launched in 2017, the Department of Veterans Affairs initiated the Whole Health for Life Program, integrating complementary and integrated health practices into the medical model.

A number of Whole Health based programs have been incorporated into the blind rehabilitation program, and have been operating since 2018.

Whole Health modalities that are available to all Veterans admitted to the Blind Rehabilitation Center include:

- ◆ Yoga
- ◆ Mindfulness
- ◆ Brain Health
- ◆ Sleep Health
- ◆ Healthy Eating
- ◆ Smoking Cessation

## VIRTUAL RECREATION THERAPY

Recreation Therapy is individualized to each Veteran, their past, present, future interests and lifestyle. Services are provided for individuals and groups in acute, residential, outpatient, home based, and telehealth settings. With the COVID Pandemic still lingering, the telehealth or virtual modalities increased.

Inpatient Programming for 2021 occurred within the blind rehabilitation center facility and took on a health and wellness theme with virtual groups and limited inpatient sessions on an individual basis.

Virtual options for Recreation Therapy within the blind and visually impaired community included stretching, strength training, and cardio workouts.

Recreation Therapy coordinated virtual programming with community partners including the Chicago Park District, Dare2tri, and Adaptive Adventures.

### **Virtual Recreation Therapy Highlights during FY2021 included:**

- ◆ A 60% increase in participation was noted in 2021 as a total of 37 Veterans participated in this new modality compared to 23 participants in 2020.
- ◆ Veterans participating represented 18 different states and Puerto Rico.
- ◆ A total of 180 group sessions were achieved during this time.

Additionally, in an effort to further enhance “**Whole Health**” initiatives, part of the Hines VA and National VA Strategic Goals, the Staff Recreation Therapist completed 200 hours of Certification training for **Yoga Instruction**, and is now a Registered Yoga Teacher. This will help expand opportunities for additional therapeutic modalities for Veterans who are blind or visually impaired, allowing greater choice for participation in blind rehabilitation training, both in person, and virtually.

## COMMISSION FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF REHABILITATION FACILITIES (CARF)

The Central Blind Rehabilitation Center at Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital has maintained CARF Accreditation for the past 20 years. Founded in 1966, CARF International is an independent, nonprofit accreditor of health and human services, including Vision Rehabilitation Services, designed to help programs maintain the best quality outcomes for their programs. Re-accreditation occurs every three years. This past July, nine programs at Hines VA, including the Blind Center, participated in the review process. After a three day review, the Blind Center was successfully re-accredited with only one consultation regarding documentation that was suggested for consideration and implementation. The Blind Center did not receive any recommendations for action, and the entire facility received an accreditation that is valid through August 31, 2024.

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION & AWARENESS

Much like 2020, the COVID 19 pandemic continued to limit abilities to reach out to community partners and stakeholders. Increasing awareness of blind rehabilitation options and programs available for all levels of visual impairment were mostly virtual through technology platforms such as Web-Ex and Microsoft TEAMS.

These platforms were readily available through internal mechanisms where we reached health care professionals and trainee's within our facility including:

- ◆ Geriatric Fellows
- ◆ Optometry Residents
- ◆ Physical and Occupational Therapy Students

A total of 44 educational hours were logged in 2021 through our Visitors Program.

Community education and awareness is also available through active professional organization membership. These organizations help facilitate community awareness through conferences, and community activities.

## PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

A number of Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center staff remain active in professional organization memberships, including:

- ◆ Association for Education and Rehabilitation (AER)
- ◆ Illinois Association for Education and Rehabilitation (IAER)
- ◆ Illinois Orientation & Mobility Specialist (IOMS)
- ◆ Association for Vision Rehab Therapists (AVRT)
- ◆ Commission for the Certification of Rehabilitation Counselors (CCRC)
- ◆ American Academy of Optometry (AAO)



**MISSION:** *The Mission of Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) is to assist eligible Veterans and active duty Service members with a visual impairment in developing the skills needed for personal independence and successful reintegration into the community and family environment.*

### **Resources:**

A Blind Rehabilitation Center provides inpatient, intensive interdisciplinary rehabilitation programs to Veterans with visual impairment within a VA medical facility support system.

Blind Rehabilitation Center residential settings maximize the opportunity for peer-to-peer interactions, which help Veterans strive to achieve their best level of independence and envision a positive future. Veterans receive a comprehensive individualized treatment plan based on their expressed goals and unique needs. Therapeutic instruction is provided on a one-on-one basis or group setting. Length of an inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Center program will vary depending on the Veteran's treatment plan. Hines Central Blind Rehabilitation Center is one of 13 Blind Centers across the U.S. For more information visit one of the websites below.

[www.hines.va.gov/services/blindrehab.asp](http://www.hines.va.gov/services/blindrehab.asp)

[www.rehab.va.gov/BLINDREHAB/INDEX.ASP](http://www.rehab.va.gov/BLINDREHAB/INDEX.ASP)

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