



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System

# Press Release

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## Local VA Infectious Disease Expert Selected to Lead Emerging Infectious Diseases Response

**CLEVELAND** – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs selected a Cleveland Infectious Disease expert to lead its Coordinating Center for [VA Science and Health Initiative to Combat Infectious and Life-Threatening Diseases](#) (VA SHIELD). This comprehensive, secure biorepository of specimens and associated data related to COVID-19 and other emerging diseases will be used to advance research, improve diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities, and develop strategies for immediate deployment in VA's clinical environments.

Dr. Robert A. Bonomo is the VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System's Associate Chief of Staff for Academic Affairs. He is a VA Senior Clinical Scientist Investigator, Director of the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center (GRECC) and Case VA CARES Research Collaborative. He is also a Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine Distinguished University Professor.

VA SHIELD will allow VA to rapidly respond to emerging diseases in a coordinated manner. Supporting VA's national emergency preparedness efforts, this new initiative better positions the nation's largest integrated healthcare provider to use its lessons learned to impact greater population health.

Veterans who use VA healthcare traditionally represent a vulnerable population in the United States. Their median age is 65 years, nearly a third belong to an ethnic or racial minority, and many have one or more chronic diseases. These factors overlap with risk of severe COVID-19 and other emerging infectious diseases.

"By understanding emerging disease data as it relates to large patient populations, VA can accelerate its research efforts to combat future outbreaks in a more coordinated, expedited fashion," said Dr. Bonomo. "The Coordinating Center of VA SHIELD will be responsible for positioning VA to respond rapidly to national and international biological events and threats and to substantially contribute to clinical research and development".

Dr. Bonomo is a nationally and internationally recognized expert in the field of antibiotic resistance and infectious disease research. His laboratory studies have focused on the mechanisms and epidemiology of antibiotic resistance and his research has involved translating fundamental discoveries and the evaluation of novel pharmaceuticals and molecular diagnostics to the clinic directly impacting Veteran patients. Presently, Dr. Bonomo is engaged in the VA and National Institutes of Health efforts to combat COVID-19 by serving on the Steering Committee of the VA Office of Research and Development. Prior to serving as the Director of VA SHIELD Coordinating Center, Dr. Bonomo served on the Executive Committee and Programmatic and Scientific Review Board (PSRB) of VA SHIELD. Additionally, he is a member of the SARS-CoV-19



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Interagency Working Group in Epidemiology and Therapeutics and is involved in the Executive Committee of VA CURES (CoronavirUs Research and Efficacy Studies).

He's received more than 70 honors and awards for his research, teaching and clinical care, has more than 65 grants to his name, and has written more than 1,000 abstracts and 600 peer-reviewed publications. Dr. Bonomo has educated and advised more than 80 physicians and researchers who have gone on to make contributions to improve the lives of Veterans and non-veteran patients here in Cleveland and across the world. Dr. Bonomo holds professorships in Medicine, Pharmacology, Molecular Biology and Microbiology, and Proteomics and Bioinformatics at CWRU School of Medicine.

Dr. Bonomo received the 2020 Mark Wolcott Award for Excellence in Clinical Leadership from VA, and in 2017, he received VA's William S. Middleton Award for his contributions to research in the fields of epidemiology, pathogenesis, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment. In 2016 he became the first non-European to receive the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Disease's Excellence Award for outstanding lifetime contributions to science, education or professional affairs in the field of clinical microbiology and/or infectious disease.

"By choosing Dr. Bonomo to lead this initiative, VA is reinforcing the strength of our team here," said VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System Executive Director / CEO Jill Dietrich Mellon, JD, MBA, FACHE. "Dr. Bonomo reflects the talent and forward thinking that's characteristic of the staff at VA Northeast Ohio. While our primary focus is on providing healthcare, a great part of that includes understanding how to treat and prevent new and emerging disease."

## **About VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System**

Focusing on treating the whole Veteran through health promotion and disease prevention, VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System provides comprehensive, seamless health care and social services for more than 110,900 Veterans across Northeast Ohio. With 18 locations of care, including 13 outpatient clinics, two community resource and referral centers, a psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery center, a chronic dialysis center, and an outpatient surgery center, VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System's quality services are easily accessible to Veterans in 21 counties. VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System also contributes to the future of medicine through education, training, and research programs.

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