

VISN 21 in FY2021: SAFETY INNOVATION QUALITY CARE FOR OUR VETERANS





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16

CONTENTS

- 4 Message from the Network Director
- 6 VISN 21 Homeless Program
- 8 Patient Experience
- 9 Pharmacy
- 10 VISN Overview
- 12 Manila Outpatient Clinic
- 14 Emergency Management
- 15 High Reliability Organization
- 16 VA Alameda Point Development Project
- 17 VA Pacific Islands HCS
- 18 VA Sierra Nevada HCS
- 19 VA San Francisco HCS
- 20 VA Palo Alto HCS
- 21 VA Central California HCS
- 22 VA Northern California HCS
- 23 VA Southern Nevada HCS
- 24 VISN 21 News

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On June 6, 1944, Onofrio “No-No” Zicari stormed Omaha Beach in one of the deadliest battles of World War II: D-Day. The 21-year-old New York native survived the sniper fire and artillery bombardment. During the intense fighting on that day, Zicari was wounded by shrapnel. More than 77 years later, Zicari was finally presented with his Purple Heart medal. The 98-year-old Las Vegas resident received the military decoration by the U.S. Army in June 2021, but he came to city council chambers on Oct. 6 to be ceremoniously pinned at the start of the government’s biweekly meeting. Las Vegas City Council and Mayor Carolyn G. Goodman also recognized the 98-year-old Zicari by naming him the October 2021 Citizen of the Month. He was joined by friends, family, Veterans and active duty servicemembers.

VISN 21

Message from the Network Director



The COVID-19 pandemic presented us with an unexpectedly challenging 2020, and 2021 brought much of the same. However, I am proud to say we were more than prepared to meet the challenge, and provided our Veterans with the world class healthcare they've earned.

None of this could have been done without the hard work of all our staff. Despite increasing risks and frustration facing healthcare workers across the country, in both the private and public sectors, we have worked tirelessly to ensure our health care systems are safe for both staff and Veterans, and that everyone has the tools they need to succeed.

To ensure we deliver the best possible care to our Veterans, we must also make sure our staff are taken care of as well. To that end, we have increased efforts to promote wellness and resilience among our employees. Their jobs are not easy, and it takes a special kind of person to be a frontline healthcare worker in these unique times. From hosting bi-weekly coping and resilience town hall meetings to ensuring facilities are

adequately staffed, we're committed to taking care of our employees so they can pass that same level of care and attention to our Veterans.

We've administered COVID-19 vaccinations to more than 240,000 Veterans and more than 20,000 employees. We're proud to be on the forefront of the fight against the pandemic, and we will continue to do everything possible to keep our Veterans and staff safe and healthy.

We continue to grow. Whether it's opening new outpatient clinics, entering into new relationships with community partners, or expanding staffing, we are committed to meeting the growing needs of the Veterans we serve.

I am grateful for every member of our staff for all the hard work they've done this year, whether at the VISN level or at our hospitals and clinics. We're all in this together, and we will never stop working to get our Veterans the high-quality care they deserve. Thank you to all our Veterans and staff for all you've done, and I look forward to another banner year of growth and improvement.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

John A. Brandecker, MBA, MPH
VISN 21 Network Director



Providers from VA Central California Health Care System's Women's Health Clinic, VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement, and Whole Health held their third annual drive-thru baby shower on Saturday, May 8, 2021. Participants received gift bags and informational pamphlets. Gifts were donated by local community partners and Veteran service organizations. To ensure safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, expecting parents received the gifts from their vehicles.

VISN 21 Homeless Program

DANICA BOGICEVIC - Network Homeless Coordinator
MELISSA MEIERDIERKS - Deputy Network Homeless Coordinator

In FY21, VISN 21's Homeless Program had another busy year conducting outreach, assisting Veterans experiencing homelessness with temporary shelter, transitional and permanent housing, employment, and connecting them with VA and community health care and other benefits.

Together with community partners, VISN 21 placed 3,457 Veterans in new permanent housing in FY21 and had 8,331 Veterans housed in HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) by the end of the fiscal year.

In response to the pandemic, VISN 21 Homeless Program staff partnered with their Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams (HPACT), Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) and Medical Outreach Teams to provide COVID Vaccines to homeless Veterans in the community and at the VA.

Homeless Veterans were a priority category when the vaccines first became available, so VISN Leads from Homeless, Pharmacy, Primary Care, Mental Health,

Quality Management, Public Affairs, Logistics, and others worked quickly with VAHCS staff to provide guidance on providing the vaccines to the homeless community. VISN staff, along with the local VA medical centers, held weekly calls starting in January 2021 to discuss efforts, share ideas, clarify guidance and review reports and data.

By the end of the fiscal year, V21 had administered one or more doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to 8,664 Homeless Veterans.

Vaccination events were held at multiple Grant & Per Diem, Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Residential and HUD-VASH Project Based sites throughout the VISN. These included smaller programs, such as the Community Action North Bay (CAN-B) GPD Program in Fairfield, California to one of the largest, the GPD/HCHV/ HUD-VASH programs at Barbers Point on Oahu, where 100 homeless Veterans received their COVID vaccine at the first of several events at this site.

In September 2021, VISN 21 had the opportunity to

restart and expand the Rideshare Program for homeless Veterans. The program provides Lyft or Uber rides to unhoused Veterans who need transportation primarily for housing, employment or medical purposes, but can also be used to transport Veterans to food banks/ grocery stores, court, and more.

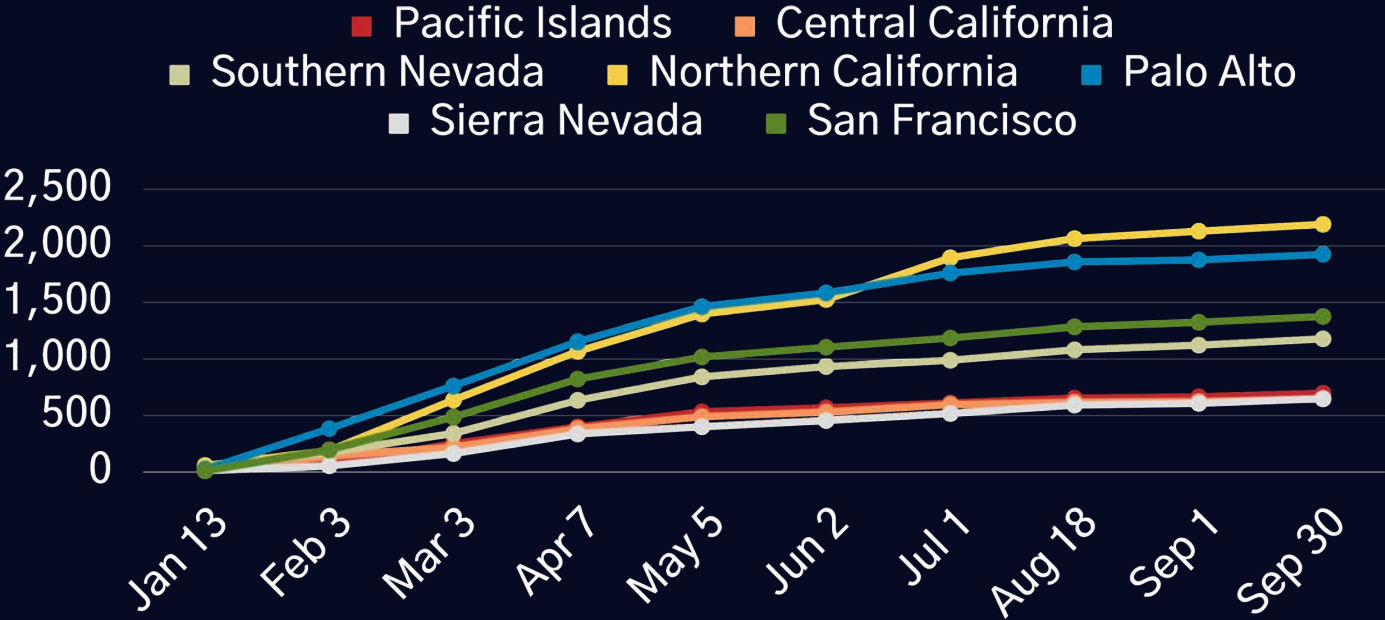
Five of our health care systems participated in the rideshare program in FY2020 as part of the VHA Innovation Ecosystem's VHA Innovators Network. In FY2020, VISN 21 completed 765 rides, an average of 96 rides per month, from February to September 2020.

In the first month of the expanded rideshare project in September 2021, VISN 21 facilities completed 162 rides. The majority of those were for medical and mental health appointments, with housing-related rides as the second largest number of rides.

In FY2022 through February, we have provided an average of 347 rides per month across the 7 health care systems, for a total of 1,735 rides.

VISN 21 Homeless Program (cont.)

Homeless Veteran COVID-19 Vaccinations

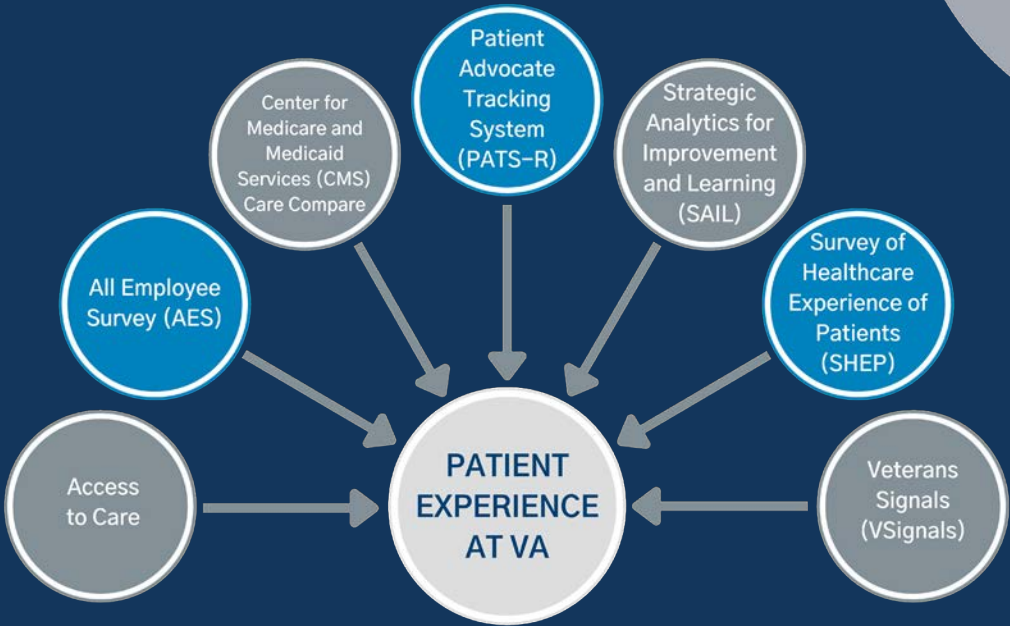


Formerly homeless Veterans received COVID-19 vaccines in Kapolei, Hawaii on March 9, 2021. Dr. Adam Robinson, VA Pacific Islands Health Care System director, and Lt. Gov. Josh Green were on hand for the event, which was held at one of many areas within VISN 21 where formerly homeless Veterans are provided emergency, transitional and permanent housing.



PATIENT EXPERIENCE

Using Veteran input to inspire changes that optimize Patient Experience at VA.



VSignals Results

VISN 21
National Average

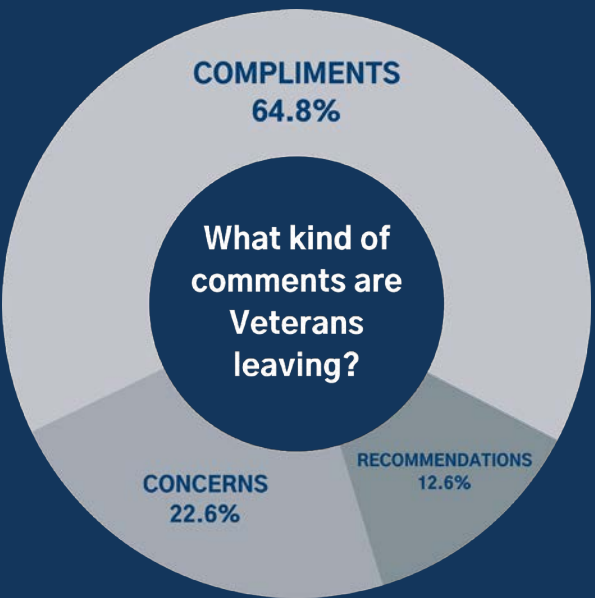


Top 5 Compliments:

- Quality of care
- Cleanliness of facility
- Interactions with staff
- Nutrition services
- Satisfaction with specialty care

Top 5 Concerns:

- Scheduling an appointment
- Appointment cancellation by VA
- Accuracy of mail order prescription addresses
- Language barriers
- Scheduling an appointment for specialty care



VISN 21 Patient Experience Champions of the Quarter:

- Q1**
Panthea Johnson
Customer Service Manager
VA Southern Nevada
- Q2**
Jeanette Rylander
Staff Physician
VA Central California
- Q3**
Jessica Peltan
Psychologist
VA Sierra Nevada
- Q4**
Andrea Bourne
Chief, Rehabilitation Service
VA San Francisco

PHARMACY

“More than metrics.”

Coined in late FY21, this phrase highlights the breadth of services and remarkable accomplishments that occur outside the metric spotlight and to celebrate our staff who made it all happen.

VISN 21 Pharmacy Benefits Management (PBM) supports the provision of clinical care and health care operations by leveraging best practices, health analytics, stewardship, and safe and effective medication use to improve Veteran outcomes and quality of care. This year, a critical component of delivering on our PBM mission included the provision of COVID vaccines and treatments to our Veterans and employees.

In addition to committing time and resources to COVID support in fiscal year 2021 (FY21), PBM increased efforts to build interdisciplinary champion stakeholders at each facility to focus on ten key clinical and medication

safety metrics. These champion groups worked together to strategically evaluate current processes and work towards creating sustainable ways to address how we can provide the best possible care and utilize our resources and health care teams in the areas of academic detailing, anticoagulation, hypoglycemia safety, substance use disorder treatment, high risk medication monitoring and safety, testosterone safety, pain initiatives, influenza immunizations, and cost stewardship initiatives. Many of the efforts started in these groups are still underway and will continue to be a focus for FY22, with progress being made towards development of sustainable solutions.

Outside of the focused top 10 areas, PBM has also continued supporting expansion of a national Prior Authorization Drug Request pilot providing equitable care related to the prescription drug benefit Veterans receive. In addition, our existing interdisciplinary clinical task forces continued to work on goals and had many achievements and lessons learned for the year that will continue to make us better!

We want to extend our endless gratitude to all our VISN 21 colleagues and partners for their dedication to the VA mission. PBM will continue its efforts to build the health care of tomorrow while supporting Veterans’ health and wellness goals today.



FY2021 Highlights:

- Similar cost-avoidance to non-pandemic years while maintaining the same high quality safe and effective care
- Met all VISN priority metrics
- Achieved high vaccination rates for Veterans and employees



VISN OVERVIEW

OPTIMIZING CARE FOR VETERANS

- Executed a \$5.66B operating budget, including \$316.4M of CARES Act funding for COVID-19
- Implemented an Electrical Safety Local Emphasis program at each site within the network
- Adapted to the new OSHA standard: COVID Emergency Temporary Standard
- Awarded the lease for a 69,000-square-foot outpatient clinic in Hawaii
- Awarded a VISN-wide lease services support contract
- Implemented new pharmaceutical waste rules in California and Hawaii
- Upgraded and refreshed VISN-wide cardiology electronic medical image information systems
- Began implementation of Medicom digital community-based radiology image sharing system
- Implemented VA Police Modernization Initiative, Phase 2
- Implemented eCitation system
- Successfully awarded 5 VISN prosthetic contractors
- Sustained improvement in prosthetic consult processing timeliness to 7.3 days

...and much more!



More than 20 years ago, U.S. Navy Veteran and VA Palo Alto employee Brian Higgins was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a rare genetic disorder that affects roughly 1 in 4,000 people with difficulty in seeing at night and loss of peripheral vision. For the past 3 years, Higgins has been actively using his prototype of a smart white cane, which can be paired with an iPhone and features feedback tools such as sound and haptic feedback. The sensor package includes light detection and ranging, commonly known as LIDAR, as well as 2 ultrasonic sensors. He won the 2021 Innovators Network (iNET) Investee of the Year Award for his prototype, and hopes to continue inventing and innovating to improve health care experiences for Veterans like him.

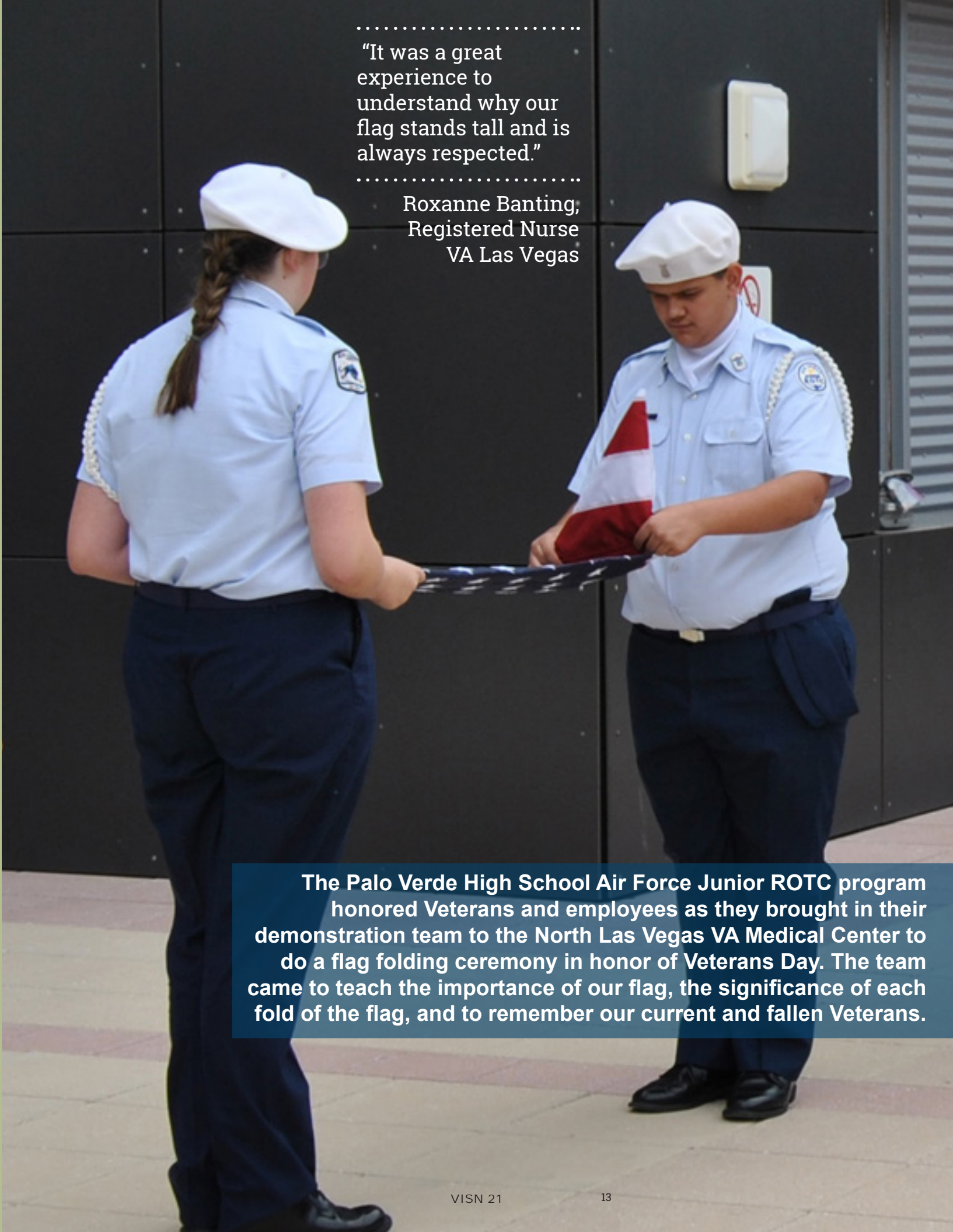
PROVIDING CARE FOR VETERANS ABROAD

VA's only healthcare facility located on foreign soil



U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic on Saturday, July 30, 2021. Austin toured the clinic and spoke to Veterans who were receiving their COVID-19 vaccines.

Clinic manager Daniel Gutkoski and his team in Manila worked tirelessly in FY2021 to provide high quality care for Veterans living in the Philippines. They successfully rolled out COVID-19 vaccines for more than 6,000 individuals from April to August 2021. They deployed effective mitigation strategies with the VISN Infection Control Committee to minimize COVID-19 infections and spread among staff. They also developed and began implementing an operational strategy for the “new normal” for post-COVID operations, with an increased focus on virtual care. This will improve Veteran safety as well as access to care for Veterans within their catchment area.



.....
“It was a great experience to understand why our flag stands tall and is always respected.”
.....

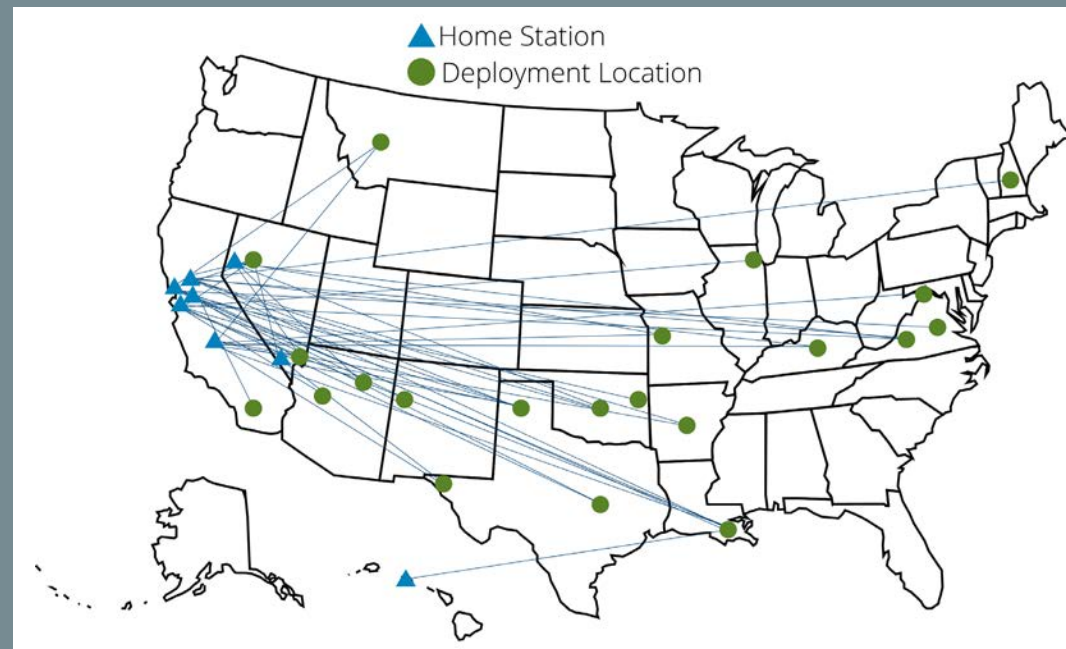
Roxanne Banting,
Registered Nurse
VA Las Vegas

The Palo Verde High School Air Force Junior ROTC program honored Veterans and employees as they brought in their demonstration team to the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center to do a flag folding ceremony in honor of Veterans Day. The team came to teach the importance of our flag, the significance of each fold of the flag, and to remember our current and fallen Veterans.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

2021 VISN 21 Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS) Deployments

TONY BARKER
EMERGENCY PROGRAM MANAGER



The Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS) is the Veterans Health Administration's main program for deployment of clinical and non-clinical staff to an emergency or disaster. In FY 2021, 80 employees from various VISN 21 locations were deployed on DEMPS missions more than 100 times. Some employees were deployed in support of multiple missions. They provided critical assistance for 23 separate missions across 14 states. Missions ranged from responses to COVID-related outbreaks, disaster relief following Hurricanes Delta and Ida, and more.

High Reliability Organization

HRO

Susan Holly, HRO Program Lead

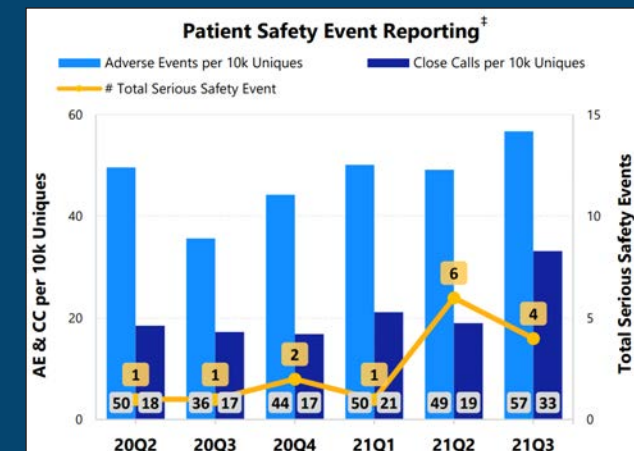
You've undoubtedly heard by now that becoming a High Reliability Organization is a journey – it's a marathon and not a sprint. Although I'm not a runner, I do know that marathon runners frequently check their times during their race to make sure they are keeping pace and maintaining consistent progress. So in the spirit of checking ourselves and our progress on this journey, I wanted to share with you VISN 21's progress towards becoming a HRO.

Although only showing data through FY21Q3, the VISN 21 HRO Dashboard graphically displays great progress. Collectively, we've trained nearly 20,000 VISN staff about HRO, and close to 200 staff on in-depth clinical team training. These are impressive numbers, exemplifying the desire and dedication to Continuous Process Improvement. We all want to get better and provide safer, efficient, evidence-based care for our Veterans. Also commendable are the improving FY21 Employee Engagement Index and Workgroup Psychological Safety scores from the FY21 All Employee Survey—both numbers going in the right direction. A simple graphic that also depicts progress on our journey is the Patient Safety Event Reporting graph (above right).

You'll notice that the light blue bar, representing the number of adverse events per 10k uniques, took a nice jump up in Q3 which speaks to staff feeling safe to report mishaps. As recently highlighted by RimaAnn Nelson, Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations for VHA, in a Change Management call, 'We can't fix or improve things if we don't know about them or they aren't reported'. Reporting is the first step. Perhaps even more impressive, however, is the large increase in the dark blue bar which represents close call or near miss reports. One litmus of claiming HRO status is when the number of close call reports outnumbers the actual event reports. This would mean that staff are truly occupied with failure and reporting "almost events" so they could be evaluated and fixed before a patient is harmed. Our numbers are improving, but we still have a way to go here.

In 3 of the 5 metrics, the raw number of adverse patient outcomes (in gray bars) declined in Q3, which is the preferred direction for these preventable events (perioperative pulmonary embolism/deep vein thrombosis, surgical inpatient deaths, post op sepsis cases). Remember, our ultimate goal in becoming a Highly Reliable Organization is to cause zero preventable harm.

Looking at this simple graphic (right) of our journey to zero harm, where would you say we are? If you look closely, you'll notice the road is not simple and straight, but curvy and twisted. Running this marathon takes time and effort. With continued diligence and focus, we will get there but it's going to take all of us to commit to a culture of safety.





VA ALAMEDA POINT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

VA is in the process of developing a “One VA” complex in Alameda, California. The 624 acres of property was acquired from the Department of the Navy in 2014 after the closure of Naval Air Station Alameda in 1996. When completed, it will serve an estimated 270,000 Veterans in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. Facilities on the site will include a 158,000 square foot Community Based Outpatient Clinic falling under the VA San Francisco Health Care System, a National Cemetery Columbarium that will have the potential to hold the remains of 300,000 Veterans and spouses, and a Veterans Benefits Service Center to help bring the many VA programs to the many Veterans residing in the area. The project has been authorized by Congress with the US Army Corps of Engineers overseeing construction. The property boasts a picturesque view of the City of San Francisco skyline and the Bay Bridge connecting Oakland to San Francisco. In acquiring this unique parcel of land, the VA committed to overseeing 512 acres as a conservation management area. In cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the conservation management area supports several species of birds to include one of the most important nesting sites for the California Least Tern, an endangered species. Currently, the site is not open to the public. Once the project is complete, the National Cemetery and the Clinic will have scheduled hours of operation. In cooperation with the City of Alameda and the East Bay Regional Park District, the Bay Trail system is planned to connect to the site and extend around the perimeter of the property.

Main Location:
Spark M. Matsunaga
Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Center
459 Patterson Road
Honolulu, HI 96819-1522

Health Clinics:
**Faleomavaega Eni Fa’aua’a Hunkin
VA Clinic**
Fiatele Teo Army Reserve Building
Pago Pago, AS 96799

Guam VA Clinic
498 Chalan Palasyo
Agana Heights, GU 96910-6427

Hilo VA Clinic
45 Mohouli Street
Hilo, HI 96720-7210

Kailua-Kona VA Clinic
75-377 Hualalai Road
Kailua-Kona, HI 96740-9724

Lanai VA Clinic
628-B Seventh Street
Lanai City, HI 96763

Leeward Oahu VA Clinic
91-2135 Fort Weaver Road, Suite 501
Ewa Beach, HI 96706-1929

Lihue VA Clinic
4485 Pahe’e Street, Suite 150
Lihue, HI 96766-2018

Maui VA Clinic
203 Ho’ohana Street, Suite 303
Kahului, HI 96732-2476

Molokai VA Clinic
280 Home Olu Place
Kaunakakai, HI 96748-0408

Saipan VA Clinic
Marina Heights Business Park
Saipan, MP 96950-9998

Windward VA Clinic
46-001 Kamehameha Highway
Castle Professional Center, Suite 301
Kaneohe, HI 96744-3711

VA Pacific Islands Health Care System



UNIQUE PATIENTS:
37,225

COVID-19 VACCINES
ADMINISTERED:
23,153

WOMEN VETERANS:
5,242

FULL TIME EMPLOYEES:
1,545

TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS:
487,551

OPERATING BUDGET:
\$533.9M

VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System



UNIQUE PATIENTS:
30,846

COVID-19 VACCINES
ADMINISTERED:
25,066

WOMEN VETERANS:
2,300

FULL TIME EMPLOYEES:
1,804

TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS:
535,684

OPERATING BUDGET:
\$440.6M

Main locations
**Ioannis A. Lougaris Veterans’
Administration Medical Center**
975 Kirman Avenue
Reno, NV 89502-0993

Health clinic locations:
Capitol Hill VA Clinic
350 Capitol Hill Avenue
Reno, NV 89502-2923

Carson Valley VA Clinic
1330 Waterloo Lane, Suite 101
Gardnerville, NV 89410-5587

Diamond View VA Clinic
110 Bella Way
Susanville, CA 96130-9102

Kietzke VA Clinic
2295 Kietzke Lane
Reno, NV 89502-3604

Lahontan Valley VA Clinic
1020 New River Parkway, Suite 304
Fallon, NV 89406-7811

North Reno VA Clinic
1140 Selmi Drive
Reno, NV 89512-4780

Reno East VA Clinic
1201 Corporate Boulevard, Suite 100
Reno, NV 89502-7162

Virginia Street VA Clinic
3674 South Virginia Street, Unit E4
Reno, NV 89502-6017

Winnemucca VA Clinic
3298 Traders Way
Winnemucca, NV 89445-3654

VA San Francisco Health Care System



Main location:
San Francisco VA Medical Center
4150 Clement Street
San Francisco, CA 94121-1545

Health clinic locations:
Clearlake VA Clinic
15145 Lakeshore Drive
Clearlake, CA 95422-8106

Eureka VA Clinic
930 West Harris Street
Eureka, CA 95503-3927

Oakland VA Clinic
2221 Martin Luther King Jr. Way
Oakland, CA 94612-1318

San Bruno VA Clinic
1001 Sneath Lane, Suite 300
San Bruno, CA 94066-2349

San Francisco VA Clinic
401 3rd Street, Community Resource &
Referral Center (CRRC)
San Francisco, CA 94107-1214

Santa Rosa VA Clinic
3841 Brickway Boulevard
Santa Rosa, CA 95403-8226

Twenty First Street VA Clinic
525 21st Street
Oakland, CA 94612-1605

Ukiah VA Clinic
630 Kings Court
Ukiah, CA 95482-5003

UNIQUE PATIENTS:
74,000

COVID-19 VACCINES
ADMINISTERED:
29,948

WOMEN VETERANS:
1,997

FULL TIME EMPLOYEES:
3,204

TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS:
600,000

OPERATING BUDGET:
\$747.1M

VA Palo Alto Health Care System



Main locations:
Palo Alto VA Medical Center
3801 Miranda Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1207

Palo Alto VA Medical Center Menlo Park
795 Willow Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025-2539

Palo Alto VA Medical Center Livermore
4951 Arroyo Road
Livermore, CA 94550-9650

Health clinic locations:
Capitola VA Clinic
1350 41st Avenue, Suite 102
Capitola, CA 95010-3906

Fremont VA Clinic
39199 Liberty Street, Building B
Fremont, CA 94538-1501

Major General William H. Gourley VA-DoD Outpatient Clinic
201 9th Street
Marina, CA 93933-6039

Modesto VA Clinic
1225 Oakdale Road
Modesto, CA 95355-3357

San Jose VA Clinic
5855 Silver Creek Valley Place
San Jose, CA 95138-1059

Sonora VA Clinic
13663 Mono Way
Sonora, CA 95370-2811

Stockton VA Clinic
7777 South Freedom Road
French Camp, CA 95231-9694

UNIQUE PATIENTS:
69,673

COVID-19 VACCINES
ADMINISTERED:
58,018

WOMEN VETERANS:
9,755

FULL TIME EMPLOYEES:
5,488

TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS:
1,095,872

OPERATING BUDGET:
\$1.3B

VA Central California Health Care System



Main location:
Fresno VA Medical Center
2615 East Clinton Avenue
Fresno, CA 93703-2223

Health clinic locations:
Merced VA Clinic
340 East Yosemite Avenue, Suite D
Merced, CA 95340-9167

Oakhurst VA Clinic
40597 Westlake Drive
Oakhurst, CA 93644-9024

Tulare VA Clinic
1050 North Cherry Street
Tulare, CA 93274-2251

UNIQUE PATIENTS:
31,724

COVID-19 VACCINES
ADMINISTERED:
24,458

WOMEN VETERANS:
2,219

FULL TIME EMPLOYEES:
1,783

TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS:
415,135

OPERATING BUDGET:
\$445M

VA Northern California Health Care System



Main locations:
Sacramento VA Medical Center
10535 Hospital Way
Mather, CA 95655-4200

Martinez VA Medical Center
150 Muir Road
Martinez, CA 94553-4668

Health clinic locations:
Chico VA Clinic
1601 Concord Avenue
Chico, CA 95928-9486

Fairfield VA Clinic
103 Bodin Circle, Building 778
Travis AFB, CA 94535-1801

Mare Island VA Clinic
201 Walnut Avenue, Building 201
Mare Island, CA 94592-1107

McClellan VA Clinic
5342 Dudley Boulevard, Building 88
McClellan Park, CA 95652-1012

Redding VA Clinic
3455 Knighton Road
Redding, CA 96002-9498

Sierra Foothills VA Clinic
11985 Heritage Oaks Place, Suite 100
Auburn, CA 95603-2413

Yreka VA Clinic
101 East Oberlin Road
Yreka, CA 96097-9645

Yuba City VA Clinic
425 Plumas Boulevard
Yuba City, CA 95991-5074

UNIQUE PATIENTS:

104,024

COVID-19 VACCINES
ADMINISTERED:

92,424

WOMEN VETERANS:

8,712

FULL TIME EMPLOYEES:

4,470

TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS:

1,600,000

OPERATING BUDGET:

\$1.227B

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System



Main location:
North Las Vegas VA Medical Center
6900 North Pecos Road
North Las Vegas, NV 89086-4400

Health clinic locations:
Master Chief Petty Officer Jesse Dean VA Clinic
3650 South Pointe Circle
Building D, Suite 200
Laughlin, NV 89029-0423

Northeast Las Vegas VA Clinic
4461 East Charleston Boulevard,
Community Resource & Referral Center (CRRC)
Las Vegas, NV 89104-5537

Northwest Las Vegas VA Clinic
3968 North Rancho Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89130-3412

Pahrump VA Clinic
220 South Lola Lane
Pahrump, NV 89048-0835

Southeast Las Vegas VA Clinic
1020 South Boulder Highway
Henderson, NV 89015-8533

Southwest Las Vegas VA Clinic
7235 South Buffalo Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89113-4040

West Cheyenne VA Clinic
3525 West Cheyenne Avenue
North Las Vegas, NV 89032-8212

UNIQUE PATIENTS:

70,342

COVID-19 VACCINES
ADMINISTERED:

58,733

WOMEN VETERANS:

7,303

FULL TIME EMPLOYEES:

2,964

TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS:

930,667

OPERATING BUDGET:

\$791M

VISN 21 NEWS

VA Palo Alto introduces K9 program

VA Palo Alto looks for unique talent when it comes to its Police Service. The range of talents within the team may rival the best police departments in the country, but their newest recruit, Atlas, brings a whole new level of skill.

Not only is he fully trained to track down lost patients and help with any drug-related cases, but he can do it all with his nose. That is because Atlas is a European Labrador Retriever that was recently acquired to join VA Palo Alto Police Service.

"The addition of our VA Police K9 team and the unique skills they offer further exemplifies our unwavering commitment to provide the safest and most secure environment for our Veterans, visitors, and fellow employees," said VA Palo Alto Police Chief and U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Martin Sizemore.

When Sizemore joined VA Palo Alto, one of his first initiatives was to implement a K9 program. With the support of executive leadership, Chief Sizemore's team was able to establish a contract with a kennel in western Pennsylvania that sought out the perfect dog.

The kennel sources all their dogs from Europe, so as soon as the contract was set up, the kennel owner flew over to Holland to find a sporting breed that matched the VA's criteria for police dogs.

Christian Mattei, a Lieutenant Detective and Air Force Veteran, is the K9 handler for Atlas. He has more than 11 years of service with VA Palo Alto Police, and after making his way to lieutenant with a solid track record, he was the obvious choice to become the first K9 handler in the health care system. He also grew up training hunting dogs but admitted there is a big difference with police dogs.

"He's a working dog, so I have a responsibility to make sure that he's trained, well fed, and he can work when the time comes. It's so much different than just having a pet or a service dog," said Mattei, who also houses Atlas in his



home during off duty hours.

Atlas' main purpose for his unit is to serve as a tracker. He can sniff out drugs on top of being able to track humans when necessary. While drugs aren't a frequent issue, he is based at the VA Menlo Park campus. The campus is home to several nursing facilities dedicated to elderly patients, some suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's Disease. The value of having an officer like Atlas is high when it comes to these populations.

Atlas even adds value to VA Palo Alto's strong relationships with community law enforcement and can be an asset for cases like missing people. However, aside from tracking skills, certain dogs can make police officers more approachable. When looking at Atlas' puppy face, that statement is undeniable!



Guitars 4 Vets returns to Reno

In July 2021, the local Guitars 4 Vets program was successfully re-established at the Reno Elks Lodge #597 by VA Sierra Nevada Recreation Therapy staff and volunteers. The program offers many benefits for Veterans, including increased skill building, healthy coping strategies and opportunities for positive social interactions, emphasizing the value of community integration.

VISN 21 NEWS

VA Pacific Islands opens new Windward Clinic



VA Pacific Islands Health Care System announced the new Windward VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) located in the Castle Medical Office Building in Kaneohe.

"We are proud to be expanding the much-needed services to our veterans," said Dr. Adam Robinson, medical center director. "This new Windward VA Clinic will increase access to VA's advanced technology, top providers and staff who will bring safe, compassionate, quality care to them. We appreciate all of the support from our community partners who have helped to make this a reality. Our Windward Oahu veterans will now have a new facility that will improve

their access to health care closer to home."

The clinic will serve enrolled veterans along the Windward Coast from Kahuku to Waimanalo. Veterans who presently receive care at VA's Ambulatory Care Clinic located at Tripler Medical Center will have the option and are being invited to use the Windward CBOC as their new medical home. This will minimize visits to Tripler, except for specific services only available there.

The clinic will offer primary care, mental health, women's health, specialty care, home-based primary care, laboratory, telehealth and audiology.



Dr. Mayan Bomsztyk, VISN 21 Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Primary Care Integrated Clinical Community Lead, is one of many VISN-level employees who also worked in VA clinics to provide direct care to Veterans, in addition to VISN duties. Dr. Bomsztyk provides coverage at the VA Clinic in Oakland, where she has helped to relieve caseload during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Care packages for caregivers

To help raise awareness for National Family Caregivers Month in November, VA Central California Caregiver Support Program (CSP) staff mailed 243 care packages to caregivers of Veterans in the Central Valley.

Caregivers play a significant role in healthcare, but often face high degrees of stress in their patient interactions. They are often unable to leave a patient's house for extended periods of time and must deal with difficult and emotional situations.

"As a caregiver, it made my day to find a surprise gift in my mailbox," said caregiver Elizabeth Pina. "While we certainly don't do it for recognition, that gesture of appreciation was heartwarming."



VISN 21 NEWS



Above: VA Central California partnered with the Fresno Vet Center in honor of Vietnam War Era Veterans, hosting a drive-through ceremony Monday, March 29, 2021. The opening ceremony featured guest speakers including Fresno Vet Center Director Herman Barretto and VA Central California Director Charles Benninger. Volunteers distributed commemorative bags, lapel pins and Presidential Proclamation letters as Veterans drove through. Other volunteers held signs welcoming the Veterans home, while an all-Veteran band played live music from the 1960s and 1970s.

Below: Ian Cavallo, a Floor Care Specialist in VA Environmental Management Services at VA Sierra Nevada, was the first national recipient in the VA western region to receive the HeRO Award for demonstrating outstanding commitment to High Reliability Organization principles.



Veterans receive dose of hope

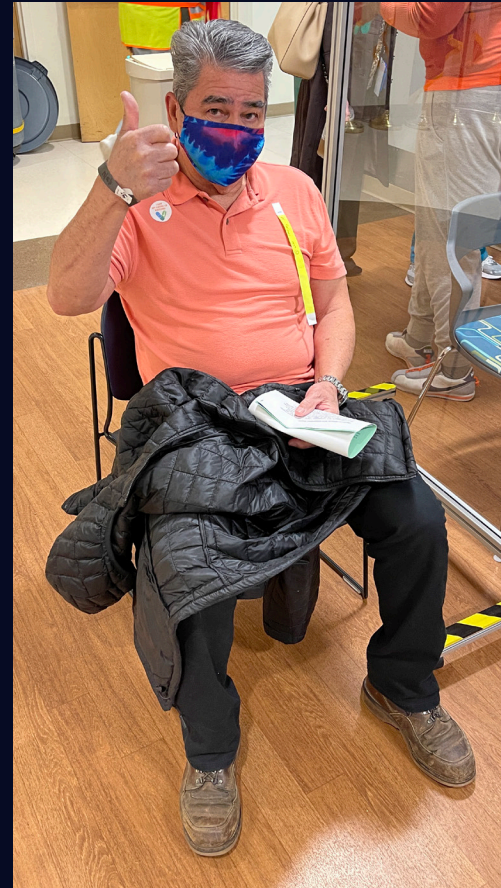
Before going to bed on Jan. 29, 2021, U.S. Air Force Veteran Ann Elizabeth Martin-Stubbs prayed for an answer. She was unsure about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine and worried that not enough research had been done on the shots. When she awoke the next day, she went to the Sacramento VA Medical Center and received her first dose of the vaccine.

Martin-Stubbs was one of the 715 Veterans and caregivers who received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at the medical center's first mass vaccination clinic Jan. 30, 2021.

As an African American Veteran and caregiver for her 92-year-old Veteran father, Martin-Stubbs was skeptical about receiving a vaccine because of experiments like the Tuskegee study. "Even though we have our doubts as a race about being guinea pigs, I'm glad I did it," she said. "I was expecting to get a vaccine sometime in the summer. I now feel relieved and more confident about getting on an airplane. This was a wonderful experience."

Martin-Stubbs wasn't the only Veteran who felt some relief at the event.

"It's good to know I've been inoculated against the virus," said Maximo Nisperos (pictured, above right), U.S. Army Veteran. "I was happy I could get the vaccine so soon. If you're older or have underlying health conditions, get the shot."



VA Northern California Health Care System (VANCHCS) received its first shipment of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine in late December 2020. By the end of 2021, VANCHCS had given 117,575 doses of the COVID-19 vaccines to Veterans, caregivers, and VA employees and volunteers.



Katie Lansing, a medical support assistant at San Francisco VA's Eureka Clinic, set up a free pantry in the clinic's physical therapy room to benefit local Veterans struggling with food insecurity. She collaborated with a local non-profit food bank to open the pantry in February 2021, inspired by stories she heard from Veterans in need.

VISN 21 NEWS

VA Palo Alto hosts mobility tour and innovation fair



On July 19, 2021, VA Palo Alto held their first in-person event since the start of the pandemic, participating in the Operation Mobility Tour. The Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders (SCI/D) Center received a new iBOT® Personal Mobility Device as part of a national donation of 25 devices to VA SCI/D Centers around the country. This unique personal mobility device allows Veterans with spinal cord injuries to move over various terrains and even climb stairs. The iBOT PMD donation is the first engagement coming out of the VA New England Center for Innovation Excellence (NECIE), benefiting Veterans by providing life enhancing technology solutions for those who are experiencing chronic and/or complex illness and injury. The event also featured an Innovation Fair, where attendees could see the latest innovations in healthcare.



As of October 1, 2021, operational control of the the Oakland VA Clinic was transferred from VA Northern California to VA San Francisco. This change was implemented to better serve Veterans in the area. The Oakland clinic is now approximately 75 miles closer to its parent facility.



Above: Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Donald Remy, left, meets with VISN 21 Deputy Network Director Ada Clark at the Ioannis A. Lougaris VA Medical Center in Reno, Nevada on September 15, 2021.

Below: Deputy Secretary Remy talks to then-acting Medical Center Director Dr. Amy Sanguinetti during his visit to the medical center.



VISN 21 NEWS

VISN 21 NEWS



Above: The Joint Commission and National Quality Forum (NQF) recognized Dr. Elizabeth Oliva (left) and Dr. David Gaba of VA Palo Alto with 2020 Eisenberg Awards, a prestigious program aimed at recognizing the best examples of individual, local, and national efforts to improve patient safety and health care quality.

Below: The VHA National Community Partnership challenge is an annual award recognizing outstanding partnerships that help Veterans and their communities. VA Palo Alto won this year for its medical-legal partnership with Bay Area Legal Aid. VA social workers identified Veterans with civil legal problems during wellbeing assessments and collaborated with Bay Legal lawyers to resolve them.



VA Reno celebrates LGBTQ+ Veterans



VA Sierra Nevada celebrated Pride Month proudly and openly in June 2021, recognizing the contributions of LGBTQ+ Veterans throughout our nation's rich history.

According to VA data, there are an estimated one million LGBTQ+ Veterans in the U.S. and many of these Veterans receive care from VA.

Facilities within VISN 21 provide numerous programs and services for LGBTQ+ Veterans and the health care providers serving them.

Veterans can utilize support groups

to meet others, develop coping skills and participate in open discussions. The programs provided, both within the facilities and in the greater community, are a testament to this year's Pride Month theme of "United for Equality."

Veterans, service members, their families and supporters are united in their love of service to our country.

VA has created and is strengthening a culture of inclusion, respect and compassion for every Veteran. We are truly united for equality.



San Francisco VA Health Care System broke ground in 2020 on a new clinic in Santa Rosa. The clinic will expand services to Sonoma County Veteran patients. The facility is scheduled to open in the summer of 2022.

The new clinic will employ 200 clinical and administrative staff and offer primary and specialty care



services, mental health, women Veteran health services, telehealth and telemedicine, dental, laboratory, occupational and physical therapy, prosthetics, pharmacy, radiology, and will also include space for clinical and administrative support staff such as information technology, logistics, scheduling clerks and housekeeping services.

VA Las Vegas holds patient experience summit

VA Southern Nevada commemorated Patient Experience Week by holding their inaugural Patient Experience Summit at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center April 29, 2021.

Co-hosted by the Veterans Experience Service and Public Affairs, the full-day event brought the health care system's new Patient Experience Committee, which consists of clinical and administrative leaders and frontline staff, together to focus on improvement in several areas.

"Our motto is 'Here Every Day is Veterans Day,'" said Medical Center Director William J. Caron (pictured). "We conducted this first-ever summit because of the importance of including the human experience in delivering quality and high-value health care."

Caron opened the summit by highlighting VASNHS' Veterans Experience Service staff and presenting each member with a patient experience superstar pin for their efforts in providing service recovery on the frontlines.

"We do great work, but oftentimes we get an individual who is upset and frustrated with the system," he said. "When this happens, our VES staff have to deescalate and try to find a way to yes for those Veterans if feasible. They also review our patient survey data and work closely with services to make sure we're providing the best experience possible."

In addition to VES staff, Caron explained that every employee, volunteer, and Red Coat Ambassador is part of the patient experience.

"Our satisfaction surveys are based on Veterans' perceptions of their interactions with our healthcare system, and much of that comes from how we made them feel," he said. "For



example, were we welcoming? Did we listen and show empathy? And were their needs addressed?"

To illustrate and learn more about the patient experience from the Veterans perspective, attendees participated in "Own the Moment" training. Then, they were provided an overview on the Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) as well as V-Signals and discussed how data can be used to improve the patient experience.

"We recently conducted a facility self-assessment, and discovered that using survey results to enhance the patient experience was our lowest scoring area out of six domains assessed," said Charles "Chuck" Ramey, VA Southern Nevada Chief of Public Affairs and Acting Chief of Veterans Experience.

"Our aspirational goal is to improve every SHEP measure tracked in SAIL (Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning) by one quintile. And, to do so, we need champions who are able to understand, interpret and communicate the data."



Above: Donia Till, left, a registered nurse in the special procedures unit at VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, was honored in February 2021 as the 2020 Pathway Direct Care Nurse of the Year by the American Nurses Credentialing Center.

Below: Three VISN 21 health care systems (Northern California, Palo Alto and San Francisco) collaborated to create an ad campaign to raise awareness of VA's Women Veteran services and programs. The ad was displayed at the San Francisco International Airport. The campaign showcases local women Veterans, directs viewers to the VHA Women's Health website, and provides access to the Women Veteran Call Center's number, offering assistance to woman Veterans everywhere. The goal is to educate women Veterans about the benefits and services they've earned. Scan the QR code to learn more.



VISN 21 NEWS

VA Reno honors women Veterans with “Through Our Eyes” display

Through Our Eyes – The Women Veterans Experience exhibit is an innovative project created at VA Sierra Nevada and available to the public online. The exhibit features portraits of women Veterans along with their My Life, My Story articles, which recount each Veteran's life in her own words. Readers can immerse themselves into the lives of brave women of different ages and branches of military service.

A large team of staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to find participants, gather their stories, take portraits and produce the final products. The exhibit aims to ensure women Veterans are recognized for their heroic contributions. Many women who answered the nation's call do not feel they receive the same appreciation as their male counterparts. Some, especially those who served in World War II or the Korean War, don't always realize or consider themselves Veterans.

The traveling photo exhibit has been seen by past VA secretaries, national commanders of Disabled American



Veterans, Nevada legislators and hundreds of Nevadans. Making it available online was in response to travel and gathering restrictions put in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

25-year-old Air Force Veteran, Genesee, and 92-year-old WWII Naval Medic, Carole, (pictured above) discovered a deep connection during their Through Our Eyes photo shoot. They are very close friends still today.



VA San Francisco's community-based outpatient clinic in Downtown San Francisco expanded this this year with a new building located at 671 Harrison in San Francisco's SoMa neighborhood. The new 671 Annex encompasses over 5,000 square feet of new clinical space, with a capacity for more than 50 staff members.

VISN 21 NEWS

VA Las Vegas nurse receives award for excellence



A VA Southern Nevada nurse won the Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing and Advancement of Nursing Programs for helping to improve health care services for Veterans.

Emergency Department Nurse Maria VanHart was one of six selected to receive the 2021 award, announced by VA Secretary Denis McDonough. VanHart was recognized for demonstrating leadership, selfless dedication to Veterans, and providing patient-centered care in a safe, efficient, and cost-effective manner.

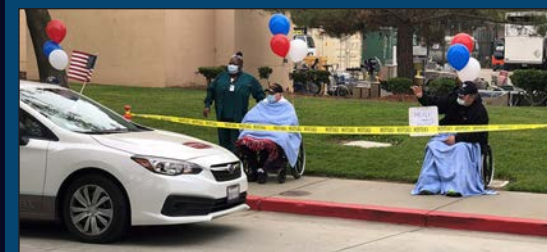
“Over the past year, our incredible professionals have answered the call to serve,” said McDonough. “Our teammates, who have displayed superior performance throughout this challenging pandemic, not only cared for Veterans enrolled in our system, but stepped up to support VA's Fourth Mission efforts to care for civilian patients in communities across the nation. In the face of uncertainty, they

cared for our most vulnerable and saved lives.”

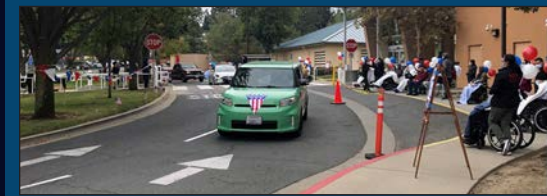
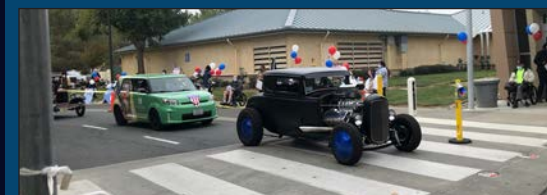
VA established the award in 1984 as a way to honor nurses and executives across its health care system.

“In line with VA's vision of quality care and service, Maria VanHart works tirelessly as a Registered Nurse in our Emergency Department to ensure our team and the Veterans who depend upon us for care have the very best experience,” said William Caron, VA Southern Nevada director. “We are so proud of her and of all our nurses who have performed with selfless dedication during this pandemic.”

VanHart was also recognized in June 2020 for providing life-saving care while off duty when she was a first responder to an overturned passenger van containing 10 people. Local police and emergency personnel noted that her triage, trauma care, and calling for helicopter medivac likely saved the lives of several of the critically injured.



Families and friends, the American Legion Riders, and community partners cheered and celebrated the Veteran residents at the Community Living Center (CLC), which is located at the Martinez VA Outpatient Clinic, with a special Parade of Families for Veterans Day 2020. Families and loved ones were able to drive by the facility and safely wave at their Veteran loved ones. To ensure the health and safety of Veterans and VA employees during the pandemic, the CLC had been unable to allow visitors, so this was an emotional event filled with smiles, honks of joy and lots of love for those who served our country.



FY2021 LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The following individuals were appointed to leadership positions within VISN 21 facilities in FY2021.



Kevin P. Amick
Director
VA Sierra Nevada



Lisa M. Howard
Director
VA Palo Alto



Drew DeWitt
Deputy Executive Director
VA Palo Alto



James Zeigler
Deputy Medical
Center Director
VA Southern Nevada



Daniel Kulenich
Deputy Medical
Center Director
VA Northern California



Kimberly J. Carney
Associate Director,
Patient Care Services/
Nurse Executive
VA Northern California



Nora Lynn B. Dwinell
Associate Director,
East Bay Division
VA Northern California



Desiree Crawford
Associate Director,
Patient Care Services/
Nurse Executive
VA Southern Nevada



Megan O'Connor
Associate Director
VA Palo Alto



Michael J. Kozal
Chief of Staff
VA Palo Alto



Richard K. Kynion
Chief of Staff
VA Pacific Islands



Katherine O. Kalama
Assistant Director
VA Pacific Islands

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration

VA Sierra Pacific Network (VISN 21)