

SPRING 2022

# Pulse



## Your Health. Our Mission.

Why Veterans trust  
VA North Texas  
with their health care



PROUDLY SERVING VETERANS OF NORTH TEXAS AND SOUTHERN OKLAHOMA FROM LOCATIONS IN

BONHAM ★ DALLAS ★ DECATUR ★ DENTON ★ FORT WORTH ★ GARLAND ★ GRANBURY ★ GRAND PRAIRIE ★ GREENVILLE ★ PLANO ★ SHERMAN ★ TYLER

# Pulse

SPRING 2022

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## VA North Texas Health Care System

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**Pulse** is published for Veterans living in North Texas and southern Oklahoma. We welcome your story ideas and suggestions. Send to: [ntxpublicaffairs@va.gov](mailto:ntxpublicaffairs@va.gov).



VA NORTH TEXAS SERVED MORE THAN 134,000 VETERANS IN FY2016 WITH ALMOST 1.5 MILLION OUTPATIENT VISITS. IT IS THE SECOND MOST COMPLEX VA FACILITY IN THE NATION, AND OUR WORLD-RENOWN CLINICIANS AND RESEARCHERS DRIVE THE TECHNICAL QUALITY OF OUR HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND PROGRAMS.

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
VA North Texas Health Care System

Changing lives.  
One Veteran at a time.



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## Director's Message

## Why should you trust VA with your health care?



### VA health care isn't for everyone—it's for veterans.

As a U.S. Air Force Disabled Veteran who uses VA for all my health care, I could give you a couple of very good reasons. And as the executive director and physician at the second largest VA medical system in the nation, I could give you a few more. For me, it's simple. I earned this benefit through my service in uniform, the care I get is tailored to my needs, and in many cases, is administered by veterans like me.

North Texas is home to some 500,000 military veterans with 185,000 enrolled and using VA health care at least once per year. A large percentage of the 315,000 veterans not enrolled with VA for their health care are eligible to do so, but for whatever reason (have good private insurance, don't even know they are eligible), have elected to leave this earned benefit untouched. A small few of these potentially eligible veterans not using VA health care may have seen a negative news report or other online item that closed any discussion of the matter before it could be realized or dispelled in-person. And it's true, VA health care is not insurance, and in most cases, does not provide medical services to family members and dependents. What VA health care does best, and I mean this sincerely because I am the beneficiary of it, is provide tailored health care that recognizes the specific and specialized physical and mental ailments that are common to the veteran population, and recognizes their service, sacrifice, and contributions to the freedoms that we all enjoy.

Why you as a veteran should trust or not trust VA with your health care is a personal decision. As a fellow veteran and senior VA leader, all I can do is give you the facts and information you need to make an informed decision to continue or seek health care with us. In a 2019 national third-party study, 91-percent of veterans said they would recommend receiving healthcare through the VA. Recent data pulled from our ongoing VA North Texas Health Care System patient experience and employee experience efforts equal or exceed this percentage. Though we're proud of our successes, our mission, and efforts to provide the very best health care to our patients is never complete. Each day is full of opportunities to focus on our mission and continue to foster and grow the trust that our patients place in us and our skilled and empathetic employees.

This special edition of Pulse magazine will give you a look at what VA North Texas Health Care System has done over the last two years, from the COVID-19 pandemic, to acquiring and opening a new medical center in Garland, to providing care nearly 3 million times to our patient population, virtually, and in person, from simple outpatient visits to mental health and specialized, high-technology procedures. We're proud of the services we provide and stand in awe each day that we get to serve you, those who've 'borne the battle.

Enjoy the magazine and thank you for trusting us with your health care. If we don't yet provide your health care, let us know how we can earn that trust.

*In your service,*

*Stephen R. Holt*

STEPHEN R. HOLT, MD, MPH, MSNRS  
EXECUTIVE MEDICAL CENTER DIRECTOR | VA NORTH TEXAS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Total number of employees

6,200



Total number of facilities

12

#### FY20 AND FY21 OPERATING BUDGETS

Community Care Expenditures

\$677,000,000



Total COVID-19  
equipment expenditures

\$62,584,000



Total number of enrolled patients

185,000



Total Episodes of care

3.1 million



Total episodes of virtual care  
(video and phone)

720,000

Total number of COVID-19  
positive patients treated

4,000



Total number of COVID-19  
vaccine doses administered

96,356

#### BY THE NUMBERS | APRIL 2020 - DECEMBER 2021



**VA** North Texas Health Care System is the second largest provider of health care to Veterans in the United States, providing complex and tailored care and treatment to over 185,000 enrolled North Texas and Southern Oklahoman patients in 40 counties.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, VA North Texas led the way in testing and providing COVID-19 vaccinations in the one of the country's largest impacted areas. In addition, 24 current and 75 completed Fourth Mission assignments involving more than 2,000 VA employees provided support to non-Veteran patients and non-VA health care systems.



#### SERVE OUR HEROES



## Expanding our health care footprint

In December 2021, VA North Texas opened its completely new Tyler VA Outpatient Clinic, a 50,000 square foot facility that greatly expands many key services for Tyler Veterans and offer new services in keeping with the needs and desires of a growing patient population. This new facility will bring more than 100 new jobs to the area and will have the capacity to serve more than 18,000 area Veterans.





## Tele-mental health care brings options to Veterans

To the VA North Texas Health Care System, COVID-19 is more than just a disease, it's a challenge that has tested the readiness of the Mental Health Program and forced it to evolve.

Back in March 2020, it became apparent that COVID-19 was going to be here for a while," said Martin Barrick, a mental health integration social worker. "We had to adapt the way we delivered mental health care. We had to figure out how to care for Veterans who are already under a lot of stress while minimizing the risk of catching and spreading this disease."

VA began piloting telehealth technology in the 1990s and has grown to become the largest provider of telehealth services in the United States. VA provides telehealth services to any Veteran who qualifies for VA health care and who lives in the U.S. or a U.S. territory.

Once seen as technology secondary to in-person visits or to reach Veterans living in rural areas, tele-mental health care is now the primary method of delivering mental health care access to Veterans. VA had already been doing telehealth appointments.

"Thankfully, our mental health department was ahead of the curve," said Kristen Backe, a PharmD and mental health clinical pharmacy specialist. "It (VA) had already been doing telehealth appointments. We increased access to mental health care, medication management and counseling for patients

who may not have otherwise had it. Patients who live far away, don't have transportation, have work or school during normal business hours, are now able to see providers virtually instead of having to come in person for every visit."

The availability of this technology made it easier to adapt to a changing landscape, but it also came with its own challenges.

"Comprehensive mental health care is not just about the words a Veteran says but their facial expressions, body language, and overall presentation," said Lindsey Cooper, psychologist and PTSD/SUD Mental Health Trauma Services.

"Providing services virtually limited our access to some of these important observations and required us to think outside the box."

Throughout every stage of the pandemic, VA North Texas still made in-person appointments and walk-in services available for Veterans seeking mental health care.

"We never closed," said Cooper. "We continued to see Veterans every day and we were even able to supply them with iPads and cell phones so they could attend appointments virtually. Additionally, we utilized the telephone as backup if the video technology failed."

Among other tools that VA developed to help Veterans cope during the pandemic is the [COVID Coach App](#). The app was created for everyone, including Veterans and service members, to support self-care and overall mental health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is available in English and Spanish.



According to Cooper, Veterans need to monitor their mental health as much as their physical health and seek help when needed.

"Today, there are more online resources available to Veterans and their families than ever before and VA truly encourages Veterans to make their mental health a priority."

"We had to adapt the way we delivered mental health care. We had to figure out how to care for Veterans who are already under a lot of stress while minimizing the risk of catching and spreading this disease."

MARTIN BARRICK  
MENTAL HEALTH INTEGRATION  
SOCIAL WORKER



## VA Video Connect:

Ensuring Veterans keep their appointments

VA Video Connect, VVC, allows Veterans and their caregivers to meet with VA health care providers quickly and easily through live video on any computer, tablet, or mobile device with an internet connection.

"The nurse called me about switching my appointment to VVC and I didn't mind at all," said Palmer. "There are certain appointments that I would rather have a face-to-face visit and that personal connection, but I do enjoy the VVCs, especially today with everything going on."

Clarence Fisher, Registered Nurse, care manager and former U.S. Army medic, said many of the patients he has called to offer the VVC appointments have been thankful for the option.

"We have been converting face-to-face appointment to VVC appointments for our Veterans as it is better with social

distancing and they can be at home rather than be out in the community and potentially putting themselves at risk," said Fisher. "We are able to help keep our Veterans safe, and they are relieved they are able to keep their appointment and get care."

VA Video Connect will work on nearly any device that has an internet connection, a web camera, microphone, and speakers.

"VVC has already been in the VA system for a while but now due to these circumstances, it gives another alternative for the Veteran to be able to see their provider," said Fisher.

Every service, including primary care, pharmacy, mental health, and social work are trained and equipped to provide VVC appointments to VA North Texas' 184,000 enrolled patients.



This was my third time using VVC and it's very convenient," said Palmer. "The first two VVC appointments I did on my laptop and this one I did on my phone and all the appointments went well and were very easy to set up and get connected."

CLINTON PALMER JR.  
U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN



U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Clinton Palmer Jr. thought for sure that he'd have to forgo his scheduled primary care appointment at the Dallas VA Medical Center with COVID-19 halting travel and requiring shelter-in-place restrictions for most of North Texas.

Thankfully, Palmer received a call from his primary care team offering an alternative option for his appointment—a VA Video Connect appointment.

For more information about VA's Video Connect, visit <https://www.mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect>



"This donation will help a VA North Texas patient with spinal cord injury dysfunction or multiple sclerosis achieve a new, life changing level of personal freedom and mobility," explained Dr. Bridget Bennett, VA North Texas' Spinal Cord Injury Center Chief.

Each of the 25 VA SCI centers, or hubs, will each receive one device and another 25 iBOT PMDs will be donated directly to eligible Veterans.

United States Congressman, District 32, Colin Allred, and VISN 17 Executive Director, Dr. Wendell Jones was among guests witnessing the iBOT PMD's demonstration by Kamen. One key feature is the user can rise to eye level, letting them interact with others and move about at a standing height.

"Partnerships between the VA and the private sector will allow our Veterans to get access to new technology," said Allred just minutes before he was challenged to experience the iBOT for himself.

Users can maintain their seat angle automatically when going up and down slopes in 4-wheel mode and ascend and descend stairs independently or with the help of a trained assistant. The iBOT can maneuver across several terrains, move through standing water and be operated remotely.

"We are extremely grateful for this donation" said Dr. Steven Holt, Director of VA North Texas Health Care System. "Our SCI team provides life-long comprehensive care through medical and rehabilitation follow-up attention. The iBOT PMD will be life-changing for Veterans."

## New technology gives spinal cord patients new freedoms

In the midst of a typical Texas summer mid-day heatwave, [VA North Texas Health Care System](#) employees, Veteran community advocates and spinal cord injury patients gathered to receive two new iBOT Personal Mobility Devices (PMDs).

The devices were courtesy of Mobius and the inventor, Dean Kamen, through the nationwide VA Operations Mobility Tour.

VA North Texas' Spinal Cord Injury Center received the PMDs from the inventor of the Segway as part of Mobius' commitment to building and distributing 50 of the freedom enhancing devices to VA's 25 Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) centers.

VA's Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders System of Care is designed around a system of "Hub and Spokes." The 25 SCI Centers are the Hubs, with each Center having trained and experienced providers including doctors, nurses, social workers, therapists and psychologists who can deal with the unique problems that affect Veterans with spinal cord issues.

### NEW TECHNOLOGY

**"Our goal is to deliver the mobility and independence our disabled Veterans deserve. It's often said, as a nation, we are in debt to Veterans for their service and sacrifice. The best way to repay this debt is to deliver advanced technology that enables them to live life on their own terms and to be as healthy and independent as possible."**

DEAN KAMEN, IBOT INVENTOR

[Trevor Baucom](#), a medically retired helicopter pilot, VA North Texas patient and an early recipient of the iBOT PMD, said the device has dramatically increased his quality of life.

"The tragic crash I survived in 2010 made me feel as though life was meaningless. Since receiving the iBOT my life has changed incredibly. I feel better about hanging out with my buddies, I can return to the shooting range and I can even go hiking with my family again."





# Make your sleep health a priority

It's no secret many of us aren't getting enough sleep.

Combating drowsiness with coffee and energy drinks has become a temporary remedy for a serious health crisis. Failing to get proper sleep is much more than regular yawning and fighting the urge to take a nap before lunch.

"Our bodies are busy with many internal activities such as metabolic, nervous and cardiovascular processes when we sleep," said Laura Freeman, [VA North Texas Health Care System](#) clinical sleep health expert. "Poor sleep, or lack of sleep, disturbs our body's systems and can cause any of these to get out of sync."

Numerous clinical studies have linked chronic poor sleep to a myriad of other complications including cardiovascular problems, obesity, Parkinson's disease, diabetes and strokes. A large (and growing) percentage of Veterans are diagnosed and treated for sleep issues and related complications.

VA North Texas treats some 20,000 patients each year for related issues in its very busy Positive Airway Program (PAP) for sleep disorders.

A sleep study is one of the best ways to detect issues and prevent the onset of related problems.

"Sleep studies help diagnose sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, periodic limb movement disorder, narcolepsy, restless legs syndrome, insomnia and nighttime behaviors like sleepwalking and REM sleep behavior disorder," said Freeman.

U.S. Army Veteran Ted Sivley credits an overnight sleep study and PAP for remedying years of fatigue and drowsiness that plagued him while still in uniform. Once requiring an overnight stay for observation, sleep studies can now be performed in a Veteran's own home and bed.

## The sleep study saved my life.

"While on active duty I had to be sent to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for a lot of tests and one of those assessments was a sleep study," said Sivley. "My body literally shut down and I flat lined during the test—the sleep study

saved my life. I use a CPAP now. At first, I didn't like wearing it, but now I look forward to it. I know I'm going to have a good night and feel well rested and alert the next day."

Other sleep strategies recommended by sleep experts include avoiding the use of electronic devices like smartphones, laptops and televisions before bedtime, avoiding caffeine in the evenings and establishing a predictable sleep schedule followed daily – not just during the workweek.

"I'm really glad I can continue with my sleep treatments and get the care I need here with VA North Texas. It's literally a life saver for me," said Sivley.



## Making life-saving preventative medical exams a priority

Navy Veteran and VA employee Amanda Lewis receives her health care through the [North Texas VA Healthcare System](#). When the system temporarily reduced its services during the beginning of the pandemic, she was worried about her yearly mammogram and its importance based on her family history.

Navy Veteran and VA social worker Amanda Lewis made her yearly mammogram a priority despite delays due to COVID-19 precautions.

"I was extremely anxious because of my family's history with cancer," she said. "I have two cancer survivor sisters along with my mother and my aunt. It was important to me that I stay on top of my screenings."

Lewis, a long-time VA North Texas patient, became concerned when her original October mammogram appointment slipped to February due to modified COVID-19 prevention measures. It was during this time that one of her cancer survivor sisters was diagnosed with breast cancer for a third time.

"I really became edgy about my wait when I got this news," she said. "Not knowing took a toll on me mentally. I kept thinking, What if?"

### Mammogram Screening Recommendations

VA recommends that women who are 45 to 74 years old, and are at average risk for breast cancer, get a mammogram every two years. Women who are 40 to 49 years old should talk to their doctor about when to start and how often to get a mammogram.

**"It's critical that patients who became overdue for screenings like mammograms, pap smears, colonoscopies, or any other preventative testing, get those scheduled or rescheduled as soon as possible."**

LESLIE SNOWDEN-CRAWFORD  
WOMEN'S VETERANS PROGRAM MANAGER

"At VA North Texas, we've worked very hard to keep everyone on schedule. We reach out to those few who are still behind and get them in as soon as possible."

Lewis' February exam came back negative. She considers herself truly fortunate for VA and her results.

"Being a VA social worker, I need to be fully dialed in to the needs of my fellow Veterans. Knowing that I am cancer-free puts my mind at ease."

Based on her service as a Veteran and VA employee, Lewis has a recommendation for all Veterans: "Don't put off your screenings and treatments because you're afraid of getting COVID-19. Get checked and get the care you earned and need."



VA employs the largest number of nurses in the United States, with more than 80,000 RNs, APNs, LPNs/LVNs, and nursing assistants. Approximately 2,300 of those nurses are employed by VA North Texas.

PATHWAY TO EXCELLENCE

# Achieving elite Pathway to Excellence designation

ANCC has six standards that they consider essential in developing a positive practice environment for nurses. Those standards include shared decision-making, leadership, safety, quality, well-being and professional development. And within each of these standards, many programs, services, milestones and benchmarks must be achieved.

"We put ourselves on a strict 24-month timeline to earn the designation," said Smith. "We did what usually takes other health care systems up to four years to achieve during this time and met all the elements of performance by exceeding their strict expectations on the road to best in class."

[VA employs](#) the largest number of nurses in the United States, with more than 80,000 RNs, APNs, LPNs/LVNs, and nursing assistants. Approximately 2,300 of those nurses are employed by VA North Texas.

The Pathway designation also has the ability to positively influence bottom-line results like employee retention, job satisfaction, and engagement.

"The Pathway designation lets the nurse know that they are valued," said Ivette Valadez, RN and VA North Texas Workforce Excellence Coordinator. "It lets them know that there are procedures in place that will support them throughout their nursing career, and it helps us attract and retain the very best talent."

Smith credits the work of Dr. Gwendella Robinson, RN and [VA North Texas](#) Associate Director for Patient Care Services for Nursing, for changing the enhancing the organizational culture and cultivating an environment in which nurses at VA North Texas can learn and advance their careers.



"Our leadership team are the best advocates, mentors, and coaches for our front-line nurses," said Smith. "We want every nurse to be involved in the decision-making and planning processes, so they are accessible, accountable, and providing the very best health care for all of our patients."

The American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Pathway to Excellence Program is the highest designation for healthy work environments that a health care system can achieve. The Pathway to Excellence designation recognizes health care and extended care organizations for creating and maintaining working outstanding environments where nursing professionals can excel.

"Receiving this elite designation was the culmination of a tireless two-year official process," said Shirleen Smith, RN, North Texas' Chief Nurse for Geriatrics, Extended Care Spinal Cord Injury and Home-Based Primary Care.



VA North Texas Health Care System was recently notified by ANCC's national board that it had met or exceeded all the requirements to be designated a Pathway to Excellence organization. To date, less than eight VA health care systems have ever achieved such a designation.

"Receiving this elite designation was the culmination of a tireless two-year official process," said Shirleen Smith, VA North Texas' Chief Nurse for Geriatrics, Extended Care Spinal Cord Injury and Home-Based Primary Care. "In December of 2017, I was approached to evaluate the Pathway to Excellence program designation and put together the pieces and personnel to make it a reality here at VA North Texas."

**Our nurses work at the forefront of everything that the entire health care system is doing. Nurses have the most direct influence on the care that our patients receive, and they dedicate their lives to caring for our Veterans. It's our obligation as an organization to provide these professionals a work environment that is conducive to excellence and gives them the best opportunity to provide a higher standard of care.**

SHIRLEEN SMITH, RN,



# Gold Star mother keeps promise to help Veteran families

After watching the events of September 11, 2001, unfold, a then 16-year-old Adam Garcia felt a calling to protect his country. Two years later, this calling would lead him to enlist in the U.S. Army and follow a legacy of service uniquely known to the Garcia family. "After his time in the military, Adam wanted to become a police officer like his father," said Cynthia Garcia, Adam's mother.

With a career in life enforcement in mind, Adam reported to the snowy grounds of Fort Drum, New York, home of the 10th Mountain Division, a light infantry contingent that can be on the ground almost anywhere in the world within a few days.

In Garcia's case, the call to pick up and move would come with a year-long deployment to Iraq and Operation Iraqi Freedom in August 2005.

During a December 2005 mid-tour visit home to Texas, Garcia shared his experience with family and friends. Afraid people wouldn't remember him "I asked him what the war was like and if he was scared," said Cynthia. "Adam said he wasn't afraid of being at war. He said he was afraid that people wouldn't remember him."



Cynthia Garcia and volunteer Martha Stallard transport donated items for the VA North Texas Fisher House.

**Fisher House is here to take care of the family while the Veteran gets care in the hospital.**

JEFFREY ALFORD | THE VA NORTH TEXAS FISHER HOUSE PROGRAM SPECIALIST.



After that conversation, Cynthia promised Adam she would never let that happen.

On May 22, 2006, Cynthia received a phone call that no mother wants to receive: Her son had been severely injured on the battlefield and was being airlifted to Landstuhl, Germany.

"We flew out to Germany not knowing where we were going to stay," said Cynthia. "At that moment, it didn't really matter – we could have been sleeping on the hospital floor. I just wanted to get to Adam. Thankfully, we were able to stay at the Fisher House."

Since 1990, the Fisher House Foundation has served more than 335,000 families. It provided over 8 million days of lodging. It also saved families more than \$407 million in lodging and transportation at military bases and VA medical centers.

Within days, Garcia was moved to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, for further treatment.

## Killed in Baghdad, not yet 21

On May 27, 2006, Specialist Adam Garcia died from injuries sustained when his convoy came under small-arms fire in Baghdad. He was not yet 21.



Portrait of Adam Garcia displayed in Fisher House

Fulfilling a promise made to her son, Cynthia became involved with the Fisher House located on the grounds of the Dallas VA Medical Center. She was determined to help those like her who found comfort in a time of great need.

In 2017, while working as an assignment editor for NBC 5 and Telemundo 39 in Dallas, Cynthia asked if she could drop off some donations that her team had collected.

"When we were staying at the Fisher House in Bethesda, Danielle, my 12-year-old daughter, said there wasn't enough for her to do," recalled Cynthia. "I suggested that we take the donations and make a corner, inside the Fisher House, where children could just be children."

The VA North Texas Fisher House agreed. It offered the Garcia family a 10-foot by 10-foot corner inside the Fisher House. Thus, Adam's Corner was born from a mother's love and a soldier's dream of meaningful service.

"Fisher House is here to take care of the family while the Veteran gets care in the hospital," said Jeffrey Alford, the VA North Texas Fisher House program specialist. "Cynthia and her team outfitted the corner with a mat, beanbag chairs, children's books, shelves and a picture of Adam."

## Adam's Corners in 13 Fisher Houses

Four years after the corner was dedicated in Dallas, others became possible at Fisher Houses across the U.S. Cynthia continues to open and modernize through donations.

**"There are 90 Fisher Houses open worldwide and 13 of them have an Adam's Corner. My hope is to have an Adam's Corner in every Fisher House."**

CYNTHIA GARCIA

Through never-ending love and a continued involvement with the Fisher House, the Gold Star mother is fulfilling the promise she made to her son in 2005.

"I told him I would make sure his service was never forgotten. It is because of him that we continue to do this."



Women Veterans represent some 10-percent of VA North Texas Health Care System's 204,000 enrolled patients, and more than 600 of its 6,400 employees. As VA North Texas's fastest growing patient population, this growth represents an opportunity to amplify its efforts and create programs to ensure timely, equitable, high-quality, sensitive, private, and comprehensive health care services for all women Veterans.

To wrap up a month-long VA Women's History Month celebration and to continue its ongoing employee and patient educational and feedback efforts, VA North Texas' Women Veterans Program team and Office of Communications and Community Engagement held a women Veterans health fair and engagement session with patients and employees at Dallas VA Medical Center.

By asking women Veteran and employees what they knew about VA women's health care, and listening to their voices, feedback, and needs, program members and senior leadership created a real-time learning environment that drives future initiatives and efforts.

"It's critical that VA employees, managers, and senior leaders capture the voices of its patients and employees, and especially those of our women Veterans," said Dr. Stephen Holt, VA North Texas Executive Medical Center Director.

"The best way to ensure we are meeting the comprehensive physical and mental needs of our women Veterans is to get their direct feedback, their ideas, and create opportunities that can best integrate them into our programs and services."

# Women's health care issues are our priority

Through VA North Texas' Veteran Outreach program, a team of three specialists met weekly, both formally and informally, with women Veterans and community and veteran-centric organizations that help women Veterans with a myriad of issues, from benefits and employment to family care and mental health. The team also created an employee lunch and learn series to engage and educate VA North Texas' professionals on women Veteran health care issues. The result of these efforts was list of commonly asked questions and concerns that the specialists then took back to the VA North Texas Women's Healthcare Coordinator and senior leadership for review and action. Some of the feedback garnered during these meetings resulted in March's women's health fair.

"As a woman Veteran and employee who gets their health care at VA, I am passionate about interactions with our women patients and gathering their feedback so we can truly

address their health care and social needs," said Yolonde Rocio, VA North Texas public affairs specialist and women Veteran advocate.

Since 2016, VA North Texas has realized a 65-percent increase in its enrolled women Veteran population, further driving initiatives like virtual events and health fairs to best engage with these patients and provide safe and accessible care tailored to their needs.

"As VA employees we must never overestimate what we think our patients know about our services and underestimate their desire to provide direct and meaningful feedback to people who can improve and build the best health care opportunities," said Rocio. "We as VA employees have a debt that we must repay each day to those who've served, and every action we do must be attributable to this debt."



By holding in-person and virtual events for patients and employees, we are driving conversations that need to happen to ensure we are properly serving those women who've selflessly worn the uniform for our country.

YOLONDE ROCIO  
VA NORTH TEXAS PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST

WE ARE

PROUD

Veteran, employee, volunteer, family member — we share a common bond and a legacy of service to those who've borne the battle.

These are the Faces of Service.

The Faces of VA.

We are strong and we are VA Proud.

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
VA North Texas Health Care System