



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Central Ohio Healthcare System

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OCTOBER 6, 2022

Columbus VA Arts Program Honored

Columbus, Ohio – The VA Central Ohio Health Care System’s Veteran Arts Initiative (VAI) was recently named winner of the Greater Columbus Arts Council (GCAC) “Employer Award” in recognition of its innovative arts programming designed to help veterans engage with the VA and its resources.

As one of several recipients of an annual GCAC Community Arts Partnership Award, VAI stood out as an organization with more than 100 employees that, “offered current, creative and innovative support to one or more arts organizations in greater Columbus since September 2021,” according to the award criteria.

“It is a huge honor to be awarded the GCAC 2022 Community Arts Partnership Employer Award,” said Heather Seymour, Director of Whole Health Partnerships and Communications at the Columbus VA. “VAI relies on local and national partnerships, individual artist collaborations, and in-kind donations to provide innovative creative arts programs focused on building bridges into VA care and out into our rich local communities.”

The arts initiative started in 2017 as an innovative way to address the issue of veteran suicide. Studies show suicide is a preventable social-cultural issue which is caused, in part, by a sense of disconnection with others and lower engagement with accessible treatment. The idea behind VAI was to connect with vulnerable veterans to help them gain access to the many treatment and wellness programs offered through VA.

“We have found that artmaking has been a powerful tool for community building and healing, and we hope to be able to support ongoing efforts within Whole Health and the VA more broadly to offer social prescribing of the arts as a complimentary treatment and tool for resiliency,” said Seymour.

As part of the broader VA Whole Health initiative, VAI is a diverse, free creative arts program for veterans, family members and caretakers that fosters mental wellness, increases social connectedness, and creates a supportive community to form positive connections with VA. Its activities include visual arts, theater, dance, music, writing, group-based contemporary art interpretation, discussion, exhibition, lectures, and research on the psychological and health benefits of art making.

According to Seymour, the results from two Columbus VAI research studies in 2017 and 2018 broadened existing statistically significant evidence related to how art making is associated with improvements in mood states, quality of life, stress, and pain.

Its mission was developed by a self-governed group of veterans, the Veteran Arts Council, who served as an advisory board and functioned as, “part think tank, part focus group,” to develop innovative solutions to meet the needs of fellow veterans.



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Since it began, VAI has engaged with more than 5,000 veterans through its innovative, multi-disciplinary creative arts programs. This approach of engaging veterans in complimentary wellness activities improves psychological health and social functioning by connecting veterans with behavioral health services when needed.

The Veteran Arts Initiative will be recognized at GCAC's [2022 Community Arts Partnership Awards](#) "Big Arts Night," on Nov. 3, from 5:00 – 7:30 p.m., at the Southern Theater and Westin Great Southern in Columbus.

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About the VA Central Ohio Health Care System

The VA Central Ohio Health Care System consists of four community-based outpatient clinics, a stand-alone behavioral health clinic, and a Level 2 complexity health care center that offer a full spectrum of primary care services, urgent care, evidence based behavioral health care, specialty medicine services, and same day ambulatory surgery for more than 50,000 veterans in 14 counties throughout Central Ohio. For more information visit <https://www.va.gov/central-ohio-health-care/>.