

True North

DIRECTING VETERAN CARE

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Erie VA Medical Center

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Integrity

Act with high moral principle. Adhere to the highest professional standards. Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.

Commitment

Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA's mission. Fulfill my individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.

Advocacy

Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.

Respect

Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.

Excellence

Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.

As I reflect on the past year, I am reminded of the high standards, character, and steadfast commitment of our team to serve Veterans, accomplish milestones, innovate, and uplift one another.

2022 was a year full of challenges – ones that presented opportunities to prove that staff at Erie VAMC are unstoppable in their pursuit of excellence.

In this annual report, you will see our actions prioritized patient care, empowered our employees, and reconnected to the communities we serve – as face-to-face activities resumed, and we entered the endemic stage of COVID-19.

At Erie VAMC, our True North is based on VA's I CARE Core Values that motivate us – and serve as sources of satisfaction – while working toward our mission.

Our mission to improve the lives of Veterans and provide world class care is multi-faceted – ranging from exceptional clinical care to exemplary environmental stewardship. I am proud of the commitment our team exhibits year after year.

The way we examine our operations and their impact on Veterans and the community is innovative and responsible – we have set a noteworthy standard. I am proud and overwhelmed with pride every day by the competent, compassionate care we provide to our patients in ambulatory, inpatient, and community settings.

True North serves as a compass, a guide from our current condition to heights we aspire to reach as a High Reliability Organization. As stewards entrusted to care for Veterans, we must consistently develop and master our skills to remain competitive and viable – and maintain trust.

Honing our skills long term lays the groundwork for the development, innovation, and transformation of the organization and the services we provide.

In pursuit of our mission, a fundamental goal of our health care transformation is to enhance the patient and employee experience. Success lies in our ability to create health interactions that place patients and providers top of mind.

I am inspired daily by our team and the care they provide to our Veterans and one another.



John A. Gennaro FACHE, MHSA, MBA
Director, Erie VAMC



➡ Erie VAMC Director, John Gennaro pictured with long-time Veteran volunteer Dennis (Denny) Sanders.



➡ (l to r) Erie VAMC Director, John Gennaro; John Poshka, Green Environmental Management Systems Manager; Daniel Gray, Plumber; Ricky Harris, Erie VAMC Associate Director.

Achievements in Sustainability

The Erie VAMC Green Environmental Management System (GEMS) manager and healthcare engineering team completed a series of water savings projects that included the replacement of an undersized dry cooler, installation of automatic flushing faucets, repair of a leaking steam line, and replacement of a commercial-grade dishwasher. These water conservation projects resulted in water usage reduction of nearly 1.8 million gallons in 2021, which represents a 21% decrease from the previous year, and approximately \$20,000 in utility cost savings. Congratulations to the Erie VAMC Water Conservation Project members:

John Poshka

Green Environmental Management Systems Manager

Phillip Tsang

Healthcare Engineer

Robert Petrone

Healthcare Engineer

Daniel Ambrose

Maintenance Supervisor

Daniel Gray

Plumber

Green Health Awards

The Erie VAMC is an honored and proud recipient of the 2022 Top 25 Environmental Excellence Awards and a Circles of Excellence Award presented by Practice Greenhealth.

The Top 25 awards showcase health practices that are committing their facilities to environmentally friendly care. Each year, the competition for the top tier increases as hospitals across the nation continue to innovate.

The program recognizes health care facilities and health systems for their commitment to environmental stewardship, full-circle sustainability – including organizational culture, and comprehensive programs.

Erie VAMC received high honors for its stewardship with water – one of our most valuable resources. The water-savings program at Erie VAMC has resulted in a substantial decrease in water consumption from fiscal year 2020 through 2021.

All projects – no matter how large or small in scale – undergo a thorough energy/water savings review.

Facility projects such as steam repair and replacement of dry coolers have contributed to this achievement. In 2021, the target goal for water efficiency was met with a 21% decrease in gallons used from the previous year.

Venango County VA Clinic groundbreaking: (l to r) Dr. Borys Loza, Lori Bergquist-Springer, John Gennaro, Lawrence Deal, Harry Whittemore, Chaplain Katie Strouse, Jan Ward, Michael Downing



Commitment Beyond Compare

In continued support of the VISN 4 Western Market Initiative, Erie VAMC hired 29 staff members to support the expansion of 7 services – strengthening the expansion of access to specialty care services to Veterans in the market to include orthopedics, podiatry, cardiology, oncology, neurology, ophthalmology, V-consult.

As we increase access to care for our Veterans, we also prioritize and **implement essential infrastructure updates**.

In July 2022, Erie VAMC broke ground on a modernized Venango county clinic – serving as the pilot for inclusive Close to Me Novel Infusion Program. Slated for completion in Spring 2023, the facility encompasses over 12,000 square feet, features the PACT model, and provides flexibility for patient care rooms to better serve Veterans.

Erie VAMC leadership was identified for its accomplishment in **HRO implementation** – in the top two percent nationally – and was invited to present at the national AMSUS conference. “Employee Empowerment: A Catalyst for Patient Experience,” was delivered to all federal agencies for distribution, highlighting Erie VAMC practices as the standard for HRO implementation and effectiveness. Our team is one of three sites selected by the Office of Product Effectiveness to demonstrate the three pillars of HRO in action – leadership commitment, culture of safety, and continuous process improvement.



Honoring Nurses | DAISY Awards Presented

Nurses are honored for their excellence through the DAISY Award. In FY22, Lori Hoffman, LPN, Unit 5, Community Living Center for helping a Veteran and getting him to the UCC, Christine Harper, LPN, Warren CBOC for caring, impacting health and wellness.

The DAISY Team award went to Dorene Sommers, ADPCS, Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS) and those deployed in FY2021. DAISY Nurse Leader Award went to Joan Mushrush, RN, Home Based Primary Care Supervisor.

Sharon Correll, RN, Employee Occupational Health Nurse was recipient of the 2022 Secretary's Award for Nursing Excellence. All these nurses demonstrated going above and beyond excellence in nursing, exemplifying each of the I CARE Core Values.



Federal Executive Board | Excellence in Government Awards – During Public Service Recognition Week in May 2022, the Federal Executive Board (FEB) in Pittsburgh, presented awards for the 2022 FEB Excellence in Government Awards.



➡ **Gold Award Winners:**
Erie VAMC Behavioral Health Diversity Team | Diversity & Inclusion
Jonathan Atkinson, Shannon Brown, and Brandon Wiley

➡ **Bronze Award Winner:**
Ashley Lauria, Lactation Consultant | Outstanding Professional Employee



➡ **Silver Award Winner:**
Deanna McStraw, Executive Secretary to the Associate Director | Outstanding Clerical Employee

➡ **Erie VAMC Police Act of Heroism | Heroic Act**
Team Includes: Officer Vlear Skisuski and Officer Nicholas Simmons



Homeless Care Team Exceeds National Goal

Erie VAMC Homeless Care Team (HCT) strongly reflects VA's I CARE Core Values. At the end of FY22, our score for Permanent Housing Placement was 142% completion, with the target percentage set by VA Central Office. Led by Jonathan Atkinson, LPC the team was expected to permanently house 50 Veterans between VHA and our Supportive Service for Veteran Families partners by end of year. In total, we housed 71 by the end of the fourth quarter – helping VISN 4 rank second across the nation for total permanent housing placements – and ranking Erie VAMC in the top five nationally. We applaud the HCT leadership and staff, and commend our community partners for their diligence and hard work.

Erie VAMC Names New Associate Director

Erie VAMC announced Rickey Harris, Jr. as the new Associate Director.

Mr. Harris, who was appointed on May 8, 2022, comes to Erie by way of the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VAMC (GVSMVAMC) where he served as the Chief of Medical Administration Service (MAS) since February 2020.

A Veteran - having served 6 years on active duty in the U.S. Army as a Health Care Specialist – he is elated to continue serving Veterans as a member of the Erie VAMC team.



➤ Bronze Award Winner:

Erie VAMC High Reliability Organization (HRO) Team | Outstanding Large Team

Kathy Dubowski (retired), Julie Ninkovic, Barbara Leuschen, Damian Siggia, Stacy Howard, Anna Chase, Danine Smola, Cassandra Boyer, Kimberly Barnes, Lori Bergquist-Springer, Melissa Washe, Kourtney Wolff, Borys Loza, Dorene Sommers, Connie Faluszczak, John Gennaro, Jeanette Anglikowski, Chanel Cook, Briana Cummings, Benjamin Okey, Nathan Gennaro, Darren Eller, Janine Burick, Amy Tabatcher, Michael Ricci, Cassandra Brewer, Richard Moreland (retired), David Lavin (retired)

Transparency and Trust

A High Reliability Organization (HRO) is an organization that has leadership commitment, a culture of safety, and continuous process improvement.

Erie VAMC is an HRO lead site that empowers employees at all levels to speak up, stop the line, and present solutions to concerns.

As a leader in patient safety, VA remains committed to continuing to build on the great strides we have made with improving safety and quality of care. The transformational HRO continuum requires steadfast leadership commitment to the goal of Zero Harm, maintaining a positive safety culture, and engaging and supporting all employees in continuous cycles of process improvement.

The HRO journey not only unleashes the incredible talent and commitment within our system to do great things, but it also supports our efforts to strengthen the trust of Veterans and staff in VA.

➤ Data

UNIQUE PATIENTS
22,234

OUTPATIENT VISITS
276,649

MALE
19,585

FEMALE
2,649

MEDICINE
45 ACUTE CARE

OBSERVATION
PATIENTS
22

COMMUNITY LIVING
CENTER
39

PSYCHOSOCIAL
RESIDENTIAL AND
REHABILITATION
TREATMENT
PROGRAM
36

POST 9/11 VETERANS
SERVED
2,645

SURGICAL
PROCEDURES
1,597

➤ Operating Budget

TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET
\$236.0 M

FACILITY
\$158.85 M

COMMUNITY CARE
\$77.5 M

MAINTENANCE COSTS
\$4.3M





Veteran Trust | Driving Patient-Centered Care

Healthy organizations are places people want to work, and where customers want to receive care. In healthy organizations, all systems and processes work well together and are appropriately aligned with the mission of providing timely, effective, and satisfying service to Veterans.

Surveys returned by Veterans enable enhancements to the way Erie VAMC provides care, benefits, and services. Improving access to VA resources starts with listening to the voice of the Veteran community, then sourcing direct feedback to improve the quality and accessibility of essential services, and designing VA customer experiences that are easy, effective, and delivered with empathy.

Erie VAMC Veteran Experience Officers consistently engage Veterans to evaluate quality of care, ease of access to services, turn insights into tangible tools, analyze growth in satisfaction and trust among Veteran patients, and empower employees to deliver better experiences.

➤ Veteran Satisfaction

OVERALL OUTPATIENT SATISFACTION

97.9%

OVERALL PATIENT RATING OF PROVIDER

83.8%

TRUST SCORE

93.7%

**“KEEP UP THE GREAT
WORK! The Erie VAMC
is truly a great hospital
with incredible staff!”**

– Local Veteran

**“Everyone was very caring
and made me feel welcome.”**

– Local Veteran

Employee Satisfaction

At Erie VAMC, we know that engaged employees consistently show up to work and have a greater commitment to quality and safety. Understandably, these employees also help our organization improve customer relationships and obtain impressive organic growth.

The Department of Veterans Affairs uses the annual All Employee Survey to evaluate the health of the organization, create a culture of engagement, and drive positive change.

Erie VAMC had the highest response rate in VISN 4 with 86% of our employees providing valuable input.

Our leadership team is committed to work with staff to improve employee engagement and experience at the facility and within the clinics. Staff feedback identified the top three priorities as: workload, communication, and growth.

As a result, each work group used the AES results as the foundation to develop departmental goals and action plans, ensuring we deliver the best care anywhere to our Nation's heroes at the Erie VAMC.





▶ Erie VAMC leadership and employees gather for CLC resident and U.S. Coast Guard, SPARS World War II Veteran Katherine (Kay) Psaropolous Koroser's 100th birthday celebration.



▶ Nurses enjoy Nurse's Appreciation Week with a hot dog picnic under the pavilion.



▶ Proudly pictured with his Hall of Heroes honorary display, Ronnie Hall, U.S. Army Veteran retired after serving fellow Veterans for 23 years.



BEST PLACE TO WORK PERCENTAGE

74%

% change FY16-FY22 +22.4%

OVERALL SATISFACTION OUT OF 5

3.90

% change FY16-FY22 +5.1%

ORGANIZATIONAL SATISFACTION

3.90

% change FY16-FY22 +11%

RECOMMEND MY ORGANIZATION OUT OF 5

4.09

% change FY16-FY22 +9.4%

SERVANT LEADER INDEX

78%

% change FY16-FY22 +16.4%



TOTAL EMPLOYEES

912

VETERAN EMPLOYEES

238

NURSES (RNS)

185

PHYSICIANS

48



▶ PX Week brought with it the spoils of cake!

Western Market Initiative

In support of the Western Market initiative, Erie VAMC continues to work toward personalized, proactive, patient-driven care. The expansion of specialty care access in collaboration with the Western Market VISN sites has enabled Erie VAMC to recruit 29 clinicians to provide services in the areas of cataract surgery, oncology, cardiology, neurology, and rheumatology without having to drive 5 hours round trip to the nearest tertiary VA facility.

Cardiology has expanded its services and plans are underway to hire a full time cardiologist and a full time CRNP to provide onsite stress testing as well as other cardiac services such as device checks, consults, echocardiograms, etc. Approximately 1200 Veterans have benefited from the enhanced services now being offered.

Ophthalmology (Cataract Surgery)

An additional local ophthalmologist was hired on a fee basis to provide surgery.

Cataract surgery currently has increased to 4 days per month. A welcome addition noted in Veterans feedback.

V-consult

This program has enabled Erie VAMC to offer an increased array of virtual care to Veterans in rural areas who have difficulty traveling. Approximately 600 Veterans have benefited from this service. This includes providing services in neurology, rheumatology, and endocrinology.

Oncology

Expanding services. A full-time oncologist and support staff will be onboarded, along with a brand-new, state-of-the art space – expected to open in spring 2023.

Erie VAMC was selected to become a Close to Me pilot site which slated to begin in FY23 at the Venango County VA Clinic. The program provides oncology care to rural Veterans to decrease travel which impacts quality of life.



TOTAL VACCINES ADMINISTERED TO VETERANS

6,934

TOTAL VACCINES ADMINISTERED TO STAFF

471

1

Ashtabula County
VETERANS SERVED
2,102
OUTPATIENT VISITS
9,001

2044 Lambrose Ln
 Ashtabula, OH 44004
 866-463-0912 or
 814-868-8661, press 2

2

Crawford County
VETERANS SERVED
2,750
OUTPATIENT VISITS
11,826

16954 Conneaut
 Lake Rd
 Meadville, PA 16335
 866-463-0912 or
 814-868-8661, press 2

3

Venango County
VETERANS SERVED
1,995
OUTPATIENT VISITS
8,882

464 Allegheny Blvd
 Franklin, PA 16323
 866-962-3260 or
 814-868-8661, press 2

4

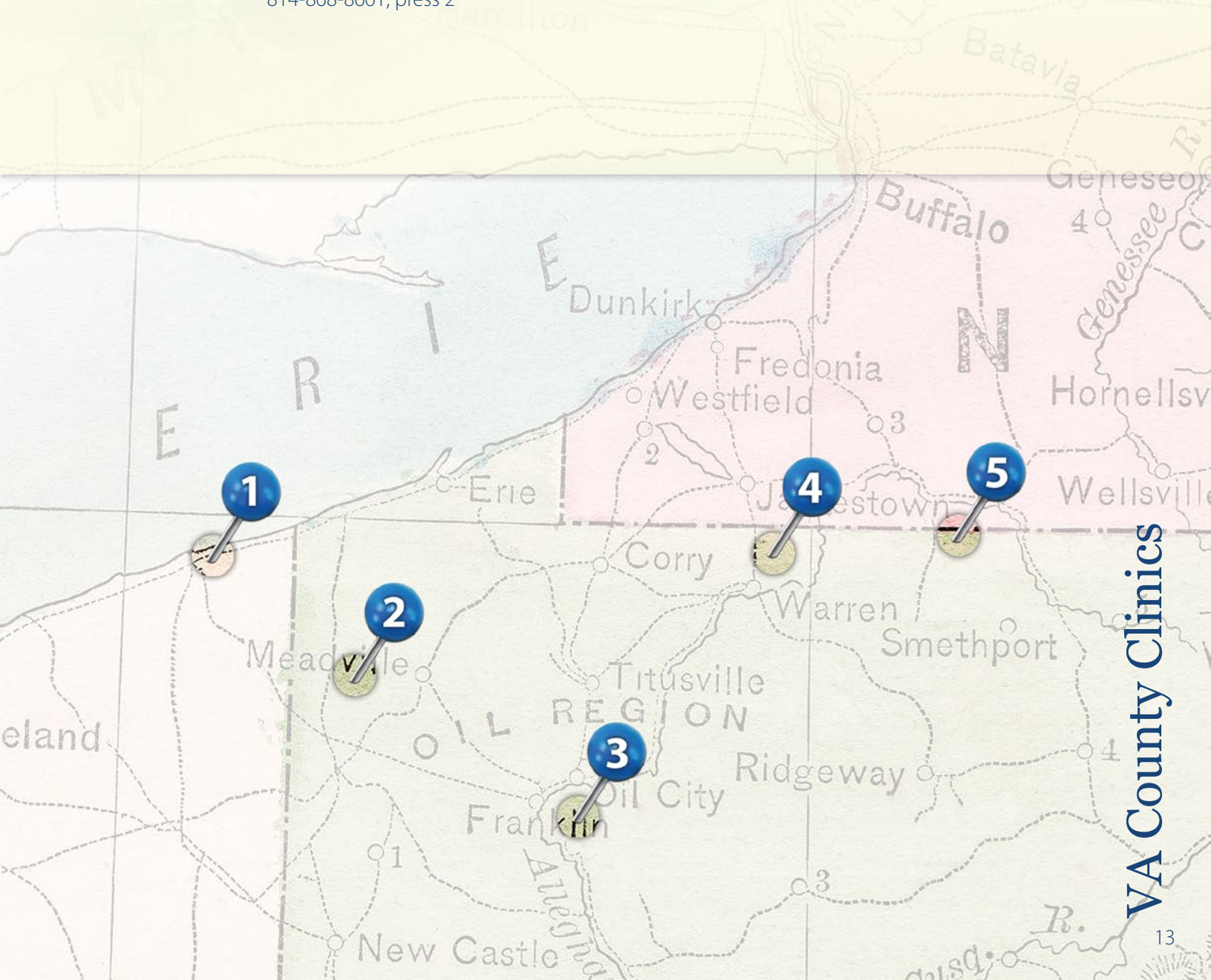
Warren County
VETERANS SERVED
2,342
OUTPATIENT VISITS
10,660

3 Farm Colony Dr
 Warren, PA 16365
 866-682-3250 or
 814-868-8661, press 2

5

McKean County
VETERANS SERVED
1,093
OUTPATIENT VISITS
5,105

20 Foster Brook Blvd
 Bradford, PA 16701
 814-368-3019 or
 814-868-8661, press 2





▶ Brian McCullough, RN – Ambulatory Surgery, 6 years with Erie VAMC | Heidi L. Craig, RN – Ambulatory Surgery, 2 years with Erie VAMC

Nursing

Nurses are at the center of VA care at the Erie VAMC. Every day, they make a profound impact on the lives of Veterans in our region by providing patient-centered, high-quality health care.

A nursing career at VA is fulfilling in ways that few professions can offer. Our mission to serve and care for Veterans is at the heart of everything we do. Our nurses work across disciplines and in all treatment settings, helping coordinate the full spectrum of patient care.

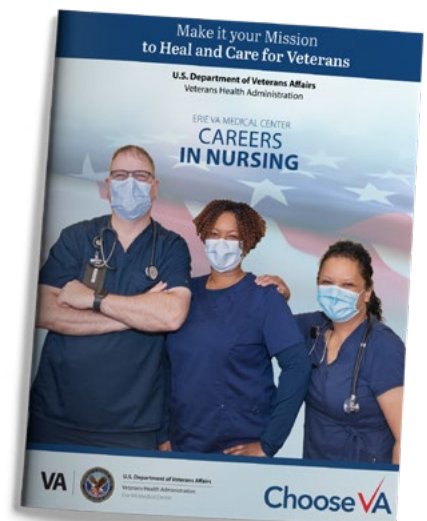
Nursing Services offers a robust mentorship program for nurses. New nurses are assigned to an experienced nurse and meet regularly during the first year of employment. The mentor provides expertise, support, and guidance to the new nurse. This relationship helps the facility retain nurses and assists in the transition of new staff into the hospital.

Nurse Recruiter

Registered Nurses ranked second among the clinical shortage occupations in VHA and are the largest occupation of employees.

Erie VAMC leadership worked tirelessly to navigate challenges presented by the pandemic – particularly stabilizing the nursing workforce in the short term – and preparing it for the future.

In FY22, Erie VAMC established a Nurse Recruiter position to actively fill critical nursing positions that help Veterans get better, faster. Mari Johnson, RN was selected for the critical role and strategically hit the ground running.



Nurse Recruiter Accomplishments & Results

DIRECTLY HIRED AND ONBOARDED

19 RNS, 11 LPNS AND 5 NURSE ASSISTANTS

- Focus on efforts that assisted with non-competitive hiring growth through active recruitment efforts including a social media campaign based on VA's I CARE Core Values, outreach events, and other sourcing of potential candidates
- FY22 Erie VAMC loss rate for RNs was 6.3%, second lowest in VISN 4, LPNs 4.4% lowest in VISN 4, NAs was 17.7%, 6th in VISN4
- The Community Living Center (CLC), Alpha management team piloted the 30-day Stay Touchpoint platform while receiving 18 new nurses over a 4-month period – new employees suggestions for process improvements were addressed and implemented timely to increase engagement with management, reorganize electronic files, and prioritize preceptorship.

The combined efforts of the Nurse Recruiter, Mentorship Committee, and Nurse Executive continue to deploy creative measures to attract and retain dedicated and compassionate nurses to deliver world-class care.

Brenda Overholts, RN joins the nursing staff at Erie VAMC.



CLC resident and U.S. Coast Guard, SPARS World War II Veteran Katherine (Kay) Psaropolous Koroser celebrates her 100th birthday with Breanna Klenz, CTRS, CLC Recreational Therapist.

Ascellon Survey

CLC received an unannounced survey by Ascellon Corporation in June 2022 and completed actions to address minor survey findings. This survey provides federal monitoring and oversight in long-term care facilities and environmental safety code relating to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services regulations.

Community Living Center (CLC)

Erie VAMC's CLC provides long-term care, short-term rehabilitation, short stay skilled services, respite, hospice, and palliative care. The CLC also focuses on restorative nursing to help maintain residents' mobility, physical strength, and independence.

The Resident Council, comprised of Veterans living on campus, worked diligently with staff to establish a detailed follow-up process to assure resident issues are addressed and results are reported to residents.

Nurse Practice Council approved re-introducing live plants into residential areas of the CLC. This allows residents to participate in caring for the plants and flowers when the weather does not allow outside activities in the outdoor garden.

The Recreational therapy department offers recreation and therapy daily, along with activities on the grounds. In addition, many residents participated in off-campus excursions as VA began to enter the endemic stage.

VA Health

Connected Care

Whether at home, the clinic, or the hospital, VA telehealth technologies ensure Veterans receive the right care in the right place at the right time.

FY 22 Highlights

- Connected Care hired its first LPN position to support high acuity clinical video appointments in the VA County Clinics. Allows Veterans requiring specialized cardiology care to have tele-cardiology service at a VA clinic located closer to their home, either in Venango or Warren. Includes application of advanced Holter monitors.
- Erie selected as one of a few sites to have open an in-person Virtual Health Resource Center (VHRC), offering on-site support to staff, Veterans, their families and caregivers in using virtual VA tools and technologies. Includes My HealtheVet, VA Mobile APPS, VA Video Connect and all telehealth services.
- Connected Care supported two cutting edge tele-eye expansion pilots. The Ashtabula County VA Clinic became home to the Maestro2 tele-eye machine. The Maestro2 improves upon existing retinal imaging by adding the Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) imaging modality. OCT imaging expands diagnostic capabilities and is standard of care for management of glaucoma, macular degeneration, diabetic macular edema, and other ocular diseases. Prior to installation of the Maestro2, all patients requiring OCT imaging were required to report to the main clinic in Erie. Expanded imaging techniques improve the quality and scope of our Tele-Eye screening program, TeleGlaucoma, and will allow for further expansion of our SFT eye care programs including the planned VISN 4 pilot of a TeleMacula clinic.
- My HealtheVet (MHV) expanded the VA's ANNIE app. ANNIE is VA's Automated Texting Platform. Patients using ANNIE receive interactive automated prompts to review health, motivational, and educational messages. ANNIE also allows Clinicians to view texts and readings as needed. Erie VAMC outpatient colonoscopy, Warren Primary Care, and Social Work programs used ANNIE for over 200 Veterans during the fiscal year.

VA Mobile

Connect today!

To find VA Virtual Care tools to fit your needs, visit:

mobile.va.gov/appstore





➤ Ashtabula County VA Clinic Advanced Telehealth Clinical Technician, Amanda Britton provides Veterans with the latest in eye care using the new Maistro2 tele-eye machine.

VA Telehealth

**UNIQUE VETERANS
SERVED USING TELEHEALTH
19,642**

**TOTAL ENCOUNTERS COMPLETED
VIA TELEHEALTH
32,715**

**VA VIDEO CONNECT (VVC) ENCOUNTERS
26,191**

**HOME TELEHEALTH
20,326**

**HOME TELEHEALTH UNIQUES
521**

**STORE AND FORWARD
2,935**

**CLINICAL VIDEO TELEHEALTH
3,589**



**MY HEALTHVET (MHV) VETERANS
WITH AN ACCOUNT
9,173**

**PRESCRIPTION REFILLS THROUGH MHV
66,678**



Please note that although most apps are available on the Apple App Store and Google Play, some apps are available only on the VA App Store through a desktop version.



VA Online Scheduling
Schedule, request and track VA appointments



VA Video Connect
Secure video visits with your VA care team from anywhere



RX Refill
Request, refill and track VA prescriptions



Pain Coach
Offers tools to track and manage pain



MOVE! Coach
Weight loss support



PTSD Coach
Support and tools to manage your PTSD

Increasing Access



➤ Suicide Prevention Coordinators, Shannon Brown and Brittany Miklos provide resources to a local Veteran during Breaking Bread with Heroes.

Behavioral and Mental Health Services

Support is essential in every step of a journey. Erie VAMC Behavioral Health Clinic (BHC) is the cornerstone in the recovery and readjustment for many Veterans. You are not alone. And we can help.

Our services range from peer support with other Veterans to counseling, therapy, medication, or a combination of these options. Our goal is to help you take charge of your treatment and live a full and meaningful life.

Erie's BHC team understands Veterans need support at home, at the facility, and in the community. This year, our team maintained and strengthened connections – virtually and in person.

PATIENTS SERVED
5,289

TOTAL VISITS
47,182

VVC ENCOUNTERS
20,405

VVC UNIQUES
2,285

Erie VAMC Mental Health Summit

- Held annually in September, the virtual summit offered crisis management and suicide prevention education and information to Veterans, family members, and community stakeholders
- Topics explored ranged from the widespread use of substances in the Veteran population to the increase in substance abuse related deaths since 2020
- Summit partners included the Butler VA Healthcare system, the Pittsburgh VA Center for the Treatment of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, the Erie County Department of Drug and Alcohol

PRRTP

Opened in July 2019, Erie VAMC Psychosocial Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (PRRTP) assists Veterans struggling with a mental and/or substance use disorder that requires more extensive care than an outpatient treatment program. The 8-bed 24/7 therapeutic setting:

- utilizes professional and peer support and bridges the gap between inpatient and outpatient behavioral health care
- helps Veterans accept accountability for their recovery, while focusing on the Veteran's needs, abilities, strengths, and goals

PRRTP
36 ADMISSIONS

Moral Injury and Suicide Prevention Virtual Seminar

Many Veterans struggle to manage issues of moral injury & suicidal thoughts. The good news is our community can provide emotional, mental health, and spiritual support to Veterans in need.

In May 2022, Erie VAMC Chaplain Services collaborated with Erie VAMC BHC to educate regional clergy, spiritual workers, and lay leaders at the Virtual Moral Injury and Suicide Prevention Seminar – the first step in providing vital care and support to Veterans.

Presenters Dr. J. Irene Harris and Brandon Wiley, LPC trained participants in:

- Understanding suicide prevention and moral injury
- Recognizing traits of suicide risk and spiritual distress
- Identifying paths for wellness and spiritual strengths to help Veterans cope

Attendees completed both pre and post surveys to measure the impact of the training and inform future iterations.



Erie Coalition Addresses Mental Health Disparities within Black and Brown Communities

In May 2022, A 40-member inter-agency coalition formed to address a growing disparity in mental health services for Black and Brown community members. The group, the Black & Brown Communities on Mental Health & Wellness, has a mission to connect BIPOC community members to culturally competent, holistic and wellness resources that reduce the development of mental health challenges and address social-emotional challenges that currently exist.

The coalition started from discussions between Erie VAMC Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator Brandon Wiley, LPC, and Erie County Department of Health Public Health, around the spike in suicide rates within the Erie community. Today, dozens of organizations and concerned community citizens comprise this coordinated community response representing industries including healthcare, Veterans Affairs, mental health services, education.

According to the World Health Organization, the trend in mental health in the United States continues to degrade in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Black and Brown individuals are equal in their experience of mental health struggles, research illuminates the disparity in mental health support, services and access. This coalition helps meet a community need by focusing on this specific group of people through interorganizational and community discussion, systems change, and public education and awareness.

In June 2022, the coalition hosted Building Resiliency: For Ourselves. For Our Family. For Our Community."

This community event spurred discussions about childhood trauma and the impact it can have on the wellness of individuals if left untreated.

The full-circle event included:

- Screening of the film, "Resilience : The Biology of Stress & The Science of Hope"
- Panel discussion with regional experts in the areas of violence, neurobiology, health, social services and trauma
- Health and wellness organizations fair



Brandon Wiley, MS LPC
Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator

Whole Health

Who knows you better than you?

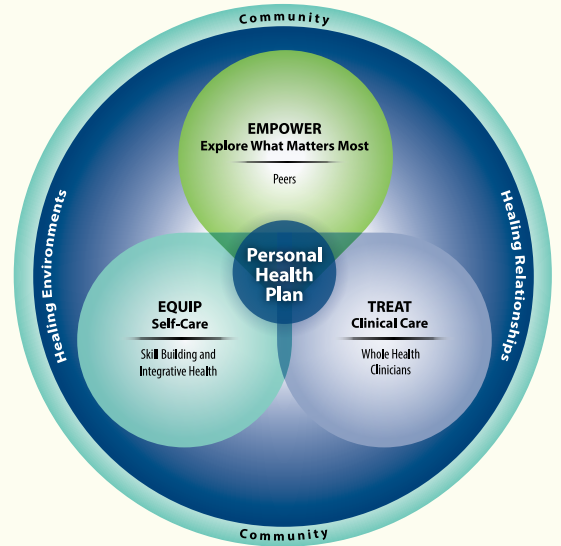
You are the most important person in your life and VA wants you to be the center of your health care.

At Erie VAMC, we believe that good health is more than the absence of disease and injury. The Whole Health approach treats the whole person — mind, body and spirit.

Many factors can influence us, including gender, culture, language preferences, and other factors that make each of us a unique individual. Whole Health allows Veterans to discover their own mission, aspiration and purpose which ultimately drives their commitment to health and well-being.

Whole Health focuses on finding out what matters to you, instead of what's the matter with you – going beyond illnesses, injuries, or disabilities.

We want you to have the skills, tools, information and team you need, so you can achieve your goals and be in your best possible health.



Dr. Peng leads a Qi Gong session under the pavilion for Veterans and employees during Wellness Week.



"I absolutely love Whole Health. I no longer suffer from chronic pain, thanks to BFA."

– Local Veteran

➤ Available Whole Health Services

- Biofeedback
- Health coaching
- Yoga
- Battlefield Auricular Acupuncture (BFA)
- Acupuncture
- Cupping for Massage Therapy
- Tai Chi
- Guided Imagery
- Mindfulness Meditation
- Clinical Hypnosis
- Reiki
- Qi Gong

TOTAL UNIQUE VETERANS SERVED
5,042

TOTAL VETERAN ENCOUNTERS
17,036

TOTAL BFA ENCOUNTERS
1,798

TOTAL BFA UNIQUES
570

Dr. Rocky Escajadillo and Chanel Cook participate in WH's VA2K Walk/Run. ➤

FY 22 Whole Health Results

- Erie VAMC WH Team led by Clinical Director, Dr. Stephen Kroth, continues to drive cultural change indicated by a large increase of Veteran encounters involving Whole Health increasing to 17,036 from 5,861 from the previous year
- As a result, we expanded available offerings to include Stress Management Education, Journaling, Mindful Muscle Mobility, and Flexibility for Joint Health
- Increased staff capacity by 2 positions, to include: Betsy Martin, Employee Whole Health Coordinator and Brian Boam, Recreation Therapist
- Increased Employee Whole Health offerings: Gratitude Journaling, Tabata Tuesdays/Wednesdays, and Percussion Massage Tool
- Piloted new classes based on Veteran input including Relaxation Techniques, Self-Massage, and X-3 Resistance Training System
- Expanded integration into Behavioral Health Department with consistent Whole Health education principles provided by Joshua Dolecki, Health Promotion Disease Prevention RN Manager



Charting Your
Path to Wellness

Planning and Expanding

Over the past several years, groundbreaking infrastructure advancements at Erie VAMC have paved the way for new, more effective ways to deliver care to Veterans. As health care providers to our Nation's heroes, it is imperative that we ensure Veterans needs can be met today and tomorrow.

An investment in the infrastructure of our health care system is a direct investment in the physical and mental health of Veterans and staff.

Our leadership remains committed to modernizing the physical plant, designing with Veterans in mind – shortening the time Veterans in rural areas spend commuting for services – and maintaining access to high quality, safe, and environmentally sustainable health care.

Primary Care Expansion Design

Creating a new Primary Care addition will provide over 8,000 SF of new clinic space, increased waiting areas, and modernization of the existing lobby and atrium. The PACT Concept of care will be implemented with 37 exam/consult rooms, 2 consult rooms, 2 procedure rooms, and administrative/support areas. Primary Care is currently in the final design phases.

First Floor Registration Renovation Design

In conjunction with the Primary Care project, a refreshing redesign of the First Floor Registration area is underway. This update includes additional waiting areas, upgraded restrooms, and a new home for the Patriot Café. This design follows completion of the new Primary Care design.



Venango County VA Clinic Groundbreaking | July 2022

On July 13, 2022, Medical Center Director John Gennaro and Chief of Staff, Dr. Borys Loza proudly hosted a ceremonial groundbreaking for the new Venango County VA Clinic.

The new location is slated for completion in Spring 2023. Encompassing over 12,000 square feet, it will feature the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) model, providing flexibility for patient care rooms to better serve incoming Veterans. It will also include waiting rooms outside of each patient area are provided in lieu of one large, general waiting area. Multi-purpose rooms allow for use between telehealth, exams, and consultations.

Arrangement of consolidated staff areas provide more efficient workflows that promote enhanced veteran care.

A sincere thank you to the Veterans, volunteers, Veteran Service Officers, elected officials, and community stakeholders who attended.

In the words of Lori Bergquist-Springer, Oil City native and clinic supervisor: "Today is a very special day for me – not just because I am a nurse or the supervisor – but as a hometown girl – giving back to my community, putting shared values into action, and serving our Nation's heroes."

Erie VAMC Medical Center Director, John Gennaro welcomes guests to the Venango County VA Clinic groundbreaking ceremony.





Chiller Plant

Construction of the new Chiller Plant on campus is a critical infrastructure upgrade that eliminates the need for future chiller unit replacements, provides more consistent heating and cooling to the patient care areas, and establishes an operational cost savings once brought online.

Construction of the new plant began with the arrival of the new chillers and cooling towers. Planned activation is scheduled for 2023.



CLC Phase 2 Design

The new expansion to the CLC includes a 20,536 SF space connected to the existing CLC with 20 resident rooms, Physical Therapy/Multipurpose Rooms, Living and Gathering Areas, an Activity Room, Dining Areas and Kitchen, as well as porches and a courtyard for enjoying Erie summers. Design for CLC Phase 2 is in the final stages, and next steps include solicitations for construction.

Million Veteran Program | Reaches 17,000th Veteran

In July 2022, we assisted VA Pittsburgh's Million Veteran Program team with enrolling the 17,000th Veteran while visiting Erie VAMC. Their research and education efforts are appreciated. A sincere thank you to the Erie Vet Center for lending their Mobile Vet Center for ease of enrollment and data collection. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of Veterans.

Donations Save Lives | Blood Drives

Erie VAMC teamed up with the Community Blood Bank of NW Pennsylvania to host quarterly blood drives in FY22 to help fight the shortage of life-saving blood caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you to everyone who supported Veterans and our community by rolling up their sleeves and donating to make a difference.

Reporter Eva Mastromatteo of Erie News Now interviews Dr. Beatrice Chakraborty, MVP Program Coordinator of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System while conducting outreach at the Erie VAMC facility.



MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS
67

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS
5,497

OUTREACH EVENTS
32

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS
23,893

► Hundreds of community members gather to honor the service and sacrifice of our Veterans at the Annual Veterans Day Parade.



Social Worker of the Year

The Social Worker of the Year Award aims to motivate Social Work employees to strive for excellence through achievement of our organizational goals. The Award promotes excellence in VA Social Work service and provides an opportunity for professional recognition, and is awarded in March – National Social Work Month.

The Erie VAMC leadership team presented a well-deserved award to Shannon Gnacinski, LSW in honor of her valiant effort to change COVID-19 visitation policies and protocols in health care facilities across Pennsylvania.

Shannon is a member of the Medical Social Work Team – serving as the Geriatric Extended Care Coordinator – a liaison between the VA and community providers, identifying needs and coordinating extended care services that allow Veterans to remain in their homes.

Shannon, we congratulate and thank you for your advocacy, perseverance, and exemplary contributions to the lives of our Veterans and community!



➡ (l to r) Erie VAMC Director, John Gennaro ; Shannon Gnacinski; Chief, Social Work, Tricia Stritzinger; and Chief of Staff, Dr. Borys Loza.

➡ CLC Residents enjoy a performance by Re-Creation, a group of volunteer entertainers who provide a national program of live entertainment for America's hospitalized Veterans in Veterans Homes and Hospitals.



Voluntary Services

During FY22, the Erie VAMC Medical Center's Center for Development & Civic Engagement (CDCE) Office (formerly Voluntary Service) accepted, recorded, and distributed over \$361,000 worth of donations (monetary and non-monetary)

VOLUNTEERS
321

VOLUNTEER HOURS
41,403

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS
5

VETERANS TRANSPORTED
10,402

MILES DRIVEN
350,481

➡ Erie VAMC Director, John Gennaro assists the Erie Elks Lodge 67 distribute holiday meals to local Veterans in need.

MAIN LINE – PHONE TREE

814-868-8661

800-274-8387 (TOLL FREE)

Press 1	Pharmacy
Press 2	Appointments & Specialty Care Providers
Press 3	Nurse Line
Press 4	Eligibility
Press 5	Billing
Press 7	Veterans Crisis Line

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINIC

814-860-2038

CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM

814-860-2657

ELIGIBILITY

814-860-2970

MEDICAL SOCIAL WORK

814-860-2529

MEDICATION REFILLS

814-868-6284

800-274-8387 (TOLL-FREE)

NON-VA CARE NOTIFICATION

Notify within 72 hours

814-860-2800 (M-F 8:00 A.M.-4:30 P.M.)

814-868-8661 (AFTER HOURS, ASK FOR
MEDICAL ADMINISTRATION ASSISTANT)

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

814-860-2212

POST-9/11 MILITARY 2 VA

(OEF/OIF/OND)

814-860-2965

VETERANS CRISIS LINE

www.veteranscrisisline.net

988 (PRESS 1)

TEXT - 838255

WHOLE HEALTH PROGRAM

814-860-2437

WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM

814-860-2907

VA MOBILE APPLICATIONS

MOBILE.VA.GOV



135 East 38th Street | Erie, PA 16504



www.erie.va.gov



VAMCErie



ErieVAMC



**Veterans
Crisis Line**

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1



CALL 988 (PRESS 1)



Chat Online at
VETERANSCRISISLINE.NET



Text
838255



The NEW PACT Act is perhaps the largest health care and benefit expansion in VA history.

- > Expands toxic-exposed Veterans access to VA care
- > Extends health care eligibility for Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 era combat Veterans
- > Adds new presumptive conditions for radiation, Agent Orange, Gulf War toxins, and burn pit exposures

VA.GOV/PACT

800-MYVA411 (800-698-2411)

VA



**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health
Administration

*Erie VA
Medical Center*

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Erie VA Medical Center

INTEGRITY | COMMITMENT | ADVOCACY | RESPECT | EXCELLENCE