

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Puget Sound Health Care System

Annual Report

FISCAL YEAR 2022



Contents

- 06 Executive Leadership
- 08 Snapshot
- 10 Expanding Access with Telehealth Services
- 10 Improving Health Outcomes through Clinical Research
- 11 Nationally Recognized Centers of Excellence
- 11 Northwest Parkinson's Disease Research, Education and Clinical Center | NW PADRECC
- 12 Epilepsy Center of Excellence | ECoE
- 12 Health Services Research & Development Center of Innovation | HSR&D COIN
- 13 Multiple Sclerosis Center of Excellence West | MSCoE
- 14 Center of Excellence in Substance Addiction Treatment & Education | CESATE
- 15 Center of Excellence for Limb Loss Prevention and Prosthetic Engineering | CLiMB
- 17 Center of Excellence in Primary Care Education | CoEPCE
- 18 Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center | GRECC
- 19 Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Center of Excellence | ALSCoE
- 20 On Forefront of Innovation
- 22 Expanded Care Through Our Regional Hubs
- 26 Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access | IDEA
- 27 Fostering Ideas to Better Serve Veterans
- 28 Community Housing & Outreach Services Program and Justice Outreach
- 29 Care Experience a Priority
- 30 Quality Care at Our Core
- 31 Primary Care for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness
- 32 Making Care More Convenient and Accessible
- 34 Electronic Health Record Modernization
- 35 Mental Health & Suicide Prevention a Continued Priority
- 36 Pain Management/Opioid Reduction/Pain Telehealth
- 37 Volunteers a Critical Part of Our Team
- 38 Nurturing Our Nation's Future Medical Professionals
- 41 Getting Veterans Out There Doing What They Love
- 42 VA's Largest Women's Health Program in Northwest Region
- 42 Fisher House - A Home Away From Home



VA PUGET SOUND PRESS RELEASE:

Senator Murray helps VA Puget Sound kick-off its first-ever outpatient clinic in Everett August 30, 2022

VA Puget Sound Health Care System announced today the opening of its new Outpatient Clinic in Everett, Washington as part of its ongoing primary care expansion plans to better serve Veterans.

Senator Patty Murray helped kick-off the celebration. Doors will open to in-person care October 3, 2022 (virtual care has been in place since November 1, 2021).

“As the daughter of a WWII veteran, I am deeply committed to being a voice for veterans across Washington state and ensuring our nation lives up to its obligations to those who served our country. No one should have to jump through hoops or drive hours out of their way to get the health care they need—but especially not veterans seeking the benefits they earned,” said Senator Patty Murray. “That’s why I’m so thrilled to join the community in celebrating the opening of this new clinic. This isn’t just a big deal for our vets in Snohomish County, but great news for those in the surrounding region who will no longer have to take a ferry or drive too far from home just to get the essential health services they need.”

Our Leadership



"The challenges faced by our health care system continue to be complex, everchanging and global. It is within this context that your VA Puget Sound Team continuously strives to improve our services, systems and outcomes. We do this through our Veteran centric care approach which embodies the VA's core values— integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect and excellence—and provides the highest quality health care to continue to set us apart. Our Veterans are the key component of this health care partnership. Thank you for choosing VA Puget Sound to be your health care system of choice!"

*VA Puget Sound Health Care System
Executive Director
Thomas Bundt, PhD, MBA, MHA, MA, MSS, FACHE*



"We've experienced growth in unique population in last 10 years while space essentially unchanged. To address the space constraints, we continue to invest in renovations and new construction projects to bring our facilities on par with the expert patient-centered care our VA Puget Sound has been delivering for almost 100 years."

*VA Puget Sound Health Care System
Deputy Director
Kathryn Sherrill, MSW, BSN*



"We use data to improve the care we provide to patients, monitor use of important resources, and to identify novel ways to enhance the health of Veterans and people around the globe."

*VA Puget Sound Health Care System
Acting Chief of Staff
Jesse Markman, MD, MBA*



"Throughout VA Puget Sound Nursing Services, we are laser-focused on providing qualified, competent and compassionate care to those we care for."

*VA Puget Sound Health Care System
Associate Director of Patient Care Services
Geraldine L'Heureux, MBA, MHA, BSN, RN*



"As we continue to press forward from the COVID-19 Pandemic, we commit to incorporating the lessons learned in supporting our diverse workforce needs and prioritizing the health and well-being of every Veteran we care for across all sites of care in our growing organization."

*VA Puget Sound Health Care System
Associate Director
Simon Kim, PhD*



"We continually strive to meet and exceed the expectations of our Veterans and their families."

*VA Puget Sound Health Care System
Deputy Chief of Staff
Connie Morantes, FACP*



"Caring for our Veterans is at the center of all that we do at VA Puget Sound Health Care System—it's why we exist."

*VA Puget Sound Health Care System
Deputy Associate Director of Patient Care Services
Michelle Bird, MSN, RN, NE-BC*

Snapshot

Patient population receiving care:

117,345

Patient growth:

6.7%

over last
2 years

Women Veterans:

12.4%

growth over
2 years

Outpatient visits:

1,093,961

16.7%

growth over
2 years

Total full-time employees: 4,458

Enrolled patients: 155,000 (approximate)

Admissions:	4,331
Surgeries performed:	4,267
Bed days of care:	74,791
Operational beds:	408
Average daily census:	205



EXPANDING ACCESS WITH TELEHEALTH SERVICES

VA Puget Sound offers telehealth services at all our care sites to improve access to care and health outcomes for our Veterans in more than 50 telehealth areas from mental health, pain and podiatry to amputee and lung transplant care.

- 52,333 unique telehealth users
- 211,739 patient encounters
 - o 752 home telehealth
 - o 197,680.5 clinical video telehealth
 - o 13,306.5 store and forward telehealth
- 48% of our patients who participated in at least one virtual care modality
- 340,507 secure messages sent

IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH CLINICAL RESEARCH

R&D continues to play a vital role in the Department of Veterans Affairs mission, and nowhere is this more evident than in the VA Puget Sound Health Care System. Our R&D program – the 4th largest in the VA – reflects our commitment to providing the highest quality of care to its Veterans. Research in the VA has always provided a valuable tool for recruitment of the best qualified physicians and scientific staff. Our affiliation with the University of Washington School of Medicine brings this Institution's premier academic medicine program to VA Puget Sound, ensuring that the professional staff and quality of care provided here is of the highest caliber, by providing access to the latest pharmaceutical therapies and diagnostic techniques. The cohesiveness and strength of this research community is felt throughout the Northwest.

Puget Sound R&D principal investigators represent virtually every major clinical department within the healthcare system, and include research areas, such as traumatic brain injury, multiple blast exposures, memory improvement, Alzheimer's disease, post-traumatic stress disorder, deployment health, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, cancer, substance abuse, lower limb prosthetics, genomics and health services. This was expanded since the pandemic to include COVID-19 related research. The effects of our strong R&D program go well beyond recruitment of high-quality clinical staff. Currently, VA Puget Sound R&D leverages a budget of approximately \$30 million annually in VA intramural funding and another \$19 million in non-VA funds (including support from NIH, DOD, volunteer health organizations, academic institutions and the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries) to manage over 700 active research projects, conducted by over 500 VA and non-VA professional, technical, and support staff; 163 of whom are principal investigators. This research is supported by a significant amount of high-tech research equipment and other tangible resources, such as dedicated research laboratories, core facilities, and office space more than 100,000 net square feet, which otherwise would not be available to the institution.

NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

VA Puget Sound has nationally recognized Centers of Excellence (in areas from limb-loss prevention and prosthetic engineering to primary care education and substance abuse treatment):

Northwest Parkinson's Disease Research, Education and Clinical Center | NW PADRECC

The Northwest Parkinson's Disease Research, Education and Clinical Center (NW PADRECC) is one of six VA Centers of Excellence for Parkinson's disease funded by VA nationally. It is comprised of two sites at VA Puget Sound Health Care System and VA Portland Health Care System. The mission of the NW PADRECC is to provide exceptional care that improves the health and well-being of Veterans with Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders through the integration of research, education, and clinical care. The service area for the NW PADRECC is extensive including the VA Northwest Network (VISN20) comprised of Oregon, Washington and Alaska, and outside VISN20 consortium centers Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Nebraska, South Dakota and Iowa.

The PADRECC teams are composed of expert neurologists, neurosurgeons, nurses, and researchers who work closely with allied health professionals

and consulting providers from other fields of health care. This structure allows each center to provide outstanding multidisciplinary care, support cutting edge research, and train the next generation of clinicians to care for Veterans with Parkinson's disease.

Highlights for Fiscal Year 2022:

- Clinicians provided care to 2,216 Veterans with Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders.
- Telemedicine visits are decreased with an effort to increase face-to-face encounters following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- No-show rates for clinic visits remained low at approximately 2%.
- Monthly virtual Parkinson's disease support groups provided Veterans and their caregivers with education about a variety of topics and information about useful community resources and services.
- Veterans were enrolled in 10 clinical research studies seeking to better understand and treat Parkinson's disease and related disorders.
- Provided clinical training to a total of 152 medical students, interns, residents and fellows. Two fellows specifically trained as movement disorder specialists graduated and began practicing.
- Investigators were supported by 42 grants from the National Institutes of Health, VA, and non-profit organizations totaling \$72,310,575.
- Faculty authored 23 articles, presented 21 abstracts and gave 45 lectures.

Epilepsy Center of Excellence | ECoE

VA Puget Sound Health Care System's Epilepsy Centers of Excellence (ECoE) is one of 17 sites in the VA that provide comprehensive epilepsy evaluation and care for Veterans with seizure disorders. The consortium of VA physicians, nurses, therapists, pharmacists and other allied health care providers share interest and expertise in improving the health and well-being of Veteran patients with epilepsy. The #1 goal of VA Puget Sound's ECoE is to improve the health and well-being of Veteran patients with epilepsy and other seizure disorders through the integration of clinical care, outreach, research, and education. The team specializes in the evaluation of patients with poorly controlled epilepsy, pre-surgical evaluation of epilepsy patients, consultation on treatment of difficult to control epilepsy patients, and the evaluation of patients with paroxysmal non-epileptic events.

VA Puget Sound's ECoE offers a range of inpatient and outpatient services. The team utilizes state of the art digital diagnostic equipment. Services include electroencephalography (EEG), Video/EEG long-term monitoring (4 bed epilepsy monitoring unit), ambulatory EEG, comprehensive inpatient care, outpatient Epilepsy Clinics, patient education, neuropsychological evaluations, and neuroradiological imaging including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), ictal SPECT, and PET scans to provide the best possible epilepsy care to Veterans. Specialized treatment options including group therapy and individualized cognitive behavior therapy for psychogenic non-epileptic seizures are available on site. Surgical capabilities include access to robot assisted surgery (ROSA), intracranial EEG monitoring, epilepsy surgery, epilepsy device implantation including vagus nerve stimulation (VNS), responsive neurostimulation (RNS), and deep brain stimulation (DBS).

Health Services Research & Development Center of Innovation | HSR&D COIN

The mission of the Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D) Center of Innovation (COIN) at VA Puget Sound is to conduct high-quality health services research that promotes Veteran-centered and value-driven care, generate and disseminate knowledge that contributes to the well-being of Veterans, work collaboratively with VA policy and operational leaders to implement research finding into clinical care, and train the next generation of health services research leaders. Research from COIN's 30 investigators have impacted VA policy and care delivery across a spectrum of primary, specialty and mental healthcare services. These impacts are solidified through partnerships with operational leaders and application of the National Academy of Medicine's Learning Health System. The COIN helps the VA become an efficient health care system where best practices and new knowledge are translated into clinical care.

Highlights from 2022 work aimed at improving access, care delivery and Veteran-centric health care innovations include:

- Approximately \$35 million in research and operations and over 350 peer reviewed manuscripts, including providing evidence of the real-world effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccinations on preventing infection or death.
- Working with 14 national operational partners including Offices of Primary Care, Specialty Care, Integrated Veteran Care, Electronic Health Record Modernization Integration, Rural Health, and Patient-Centered Care and Cultural Transformation.
- Leading the country on incorporating Veteran engagement into research with our Veteran Engagement Board.



Multiple Sclerosis Center of Excellence West | MSCoE

The Multiple Sclerosis Centers of Excellence (MSCoE) are congressionally mandated and funded by the National Neurology Program. The West is co-located at VA Puget Sound Health Care System and VA Portland Health Care System. The East is co-located at VA health care systems in Baltimore and Washington, DC. The centers work to further the understanding of MS and its impact on Veterans and to ensure access to effective treatments to help manage MS and its associated symptoms. The MSCoE works with a national network of 36 MS regional programs and 55 support programs throughout the country. Highlights for the MSCoE and more about MS can be found on the MSCoE website at www.va.gov/ms

MSCoE West is fortunate to partner with VA Puget Sound's MS Regional Program, an interdisciplinary team of MS specialists who are nationally known for the development, testing and disseminating high quality, innovative clinical strategies to the diagnosis and management of MS throughout VISN 20 and accepts e-consults from VISNs 12-23. This team evaluates and manages MS at all stages of the disease, prescribes appropriate and safe state-of-the art disease modifying agents, symptom management strategies and medication, medically necessary adaptive technology, and provides education about MS to Veterans, family members and others involved in the care of a Veteran with MS. The VA Puget Sound Regional Program sees approximately 400 Veterans with MS in the clinics in Seattle and American Lake and by telehealth. The VA Puget Sound MS Regional team collaborates with affiliated organizations such as the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the National MS Society, the Consortium of MS Centers, and others.

Highlights for Fiscal Year 2022:

- Team Fatigue Education Day.
- Specialty Spasticity, Headache and Bracing clinics.
- A Veteran and provider Bike MS Deception Pass Team.
- Presentations and informal discussions for the MS support group.
- MS Clinic experience for University of Washington medical students, residents and fellows.
- Formal lectures on MS and its treatment to neurology and PM&R residents.

MSCoE is also involved with the annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG). Each year, 12-15% of the Veterans participating at the NVWG are living with MS. The Veterans compete in over 21 wheelchair sports events such as wheelchair basketball, swimming, field events, cycling, power soccer and pickleball. This summer, the NVWG will be held in Portland, Oregon July 4-9, 2023. Registration opens February 1 and closes April 5, 2023. More info is located at www.wheelchairgames.org.

Center of Excellence in Substance Addiction Treatment & Education | CESATE

VA Puget Sound's Center of Excellence in Substance Addiction Treatment & Education (CESATE) serves as a national resource, with a mission of improving the quality, clinical outcomes and cost-effectiveness of health care for Veterans with substance use disorders. The Center is alert to national trends in substance misuse (e.g., the opioid epidemic), related consequences (e.g., overdose) and gaps in health care services, as well as new treatments and priorities of the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP). We partner with OMHSP to evaluate the national roll-out of the Stepped Care for Opioid Use Disorder Train-the-Trainer (SCOUTT) program, which aims to increase access to medication treatment for opioid use disorder.

Highlights for Fiscal Year 2022:

- A publication by Dr. Tracy Simpson and colleagues in the journal PLOS ONE describes results of a randomized controlled trial with Veterans and non-Veterans with PTSD and an active alcohol use disorder that found that evidence-based behavioral treatments targeting either one of the two co-occurring disorders improve both PTSD and drinking outcomes.
- We are collaborating with Yale and New York universities on a multisite study to assess the effects of flexible take-home methadone guidelines for patients with opioid use disorder to inform future state and federal methadone treatment policies.
- CESATE investigators and colleagues reported on the positive results of the SCOUTT initiative to increase Veterans' access to medication for

opioid use disorder among 35 non-addiction clinics across 18 VA facilities. This work highlights a significant increase in the monthly proportion of patients receiving medication treatment for opioid use disorder across SCOUTT non-addiction clinics, relative to comparison clinics.

- CESATE's collaboration with investigators at Columbia and the New York Harbor VA on a large National Institutes of Health-funded project examining the impact of state-level medical and recreational marijuana laws on cannabis use disorders among Veterans seen in VA resulted in a significant publication showing increasing prevalence of cannabis use disorders between 2005 and 2019. This work highlights the importance of attending to cannabis use in our work with Veterans.



Center of Excellence for Limb Loss Prevention and Prosthetic Engineering | CLiMB

The mission of VA Puget Sound's Center for Limb Loss and MoBility (CLiMB) is to preserve, restore, and enhance functional mobility, independence, and participation in Veterans with lower limb loss or other musculoskeletal impairments.

Highlights for Fiscal Year 2022:

- Clinical Trials: CLiMB conducted a multisite prospective cohort study of 517 participants who presented for surgical treatment of end stage ankle arthritis comparing two different interventions, ankle replacement and ankle fusion. (Sangeorzan et al., JBJS. 2021). At 48 months post-surgery, this study reported notable improvement after both procedures; however, improvements were significantly

greater after ankle replacement in nearly every measure. Some study participants are entering into their 10th year of follow-up, far exceeding any published comparative study in the literature. CLiMB was awarded an NIH pre-clinical trial observational study grant comparing various treatments for arthritis in the big toe and has just recently eclipsed recruitment of over 100 participants.

- Orthotic design: Advances in 3D printing, materials, and software have allowed for the custom design of insoles for individuals with a risk of diabetic foot ulcers. CLiMB researchers received a VARR&D Merit Review to determine if 3D printed insoles are better at reducing diabetic foot ulcers than the traditional insoles.



CLiMB researchers have filed a provisional patent for their 3D printed insole design. Ankle-foot orthoses (AFO), a joint stabilizing ankle brace are often prescribed to individuals with lower extremity injuries. Our research team has been testing a variety of commercial ankle braces and has won recognition at the Military Health and Research Symposium (Shuman MHSRS 2022, 3rd place poster).

- **Amputation Level Optimization:** For patients faced with lower limb amputation, the choice of amputation level can have a profound effect on key outcomes. CLiMB researchers have developed prediction models that have been incorporated into the AMPREDICT Decision Support Tool (DST) that can inform an individual patient’s risk of mortality, need for re-amputation, and mobility 1-year post amputation (Norvell DC, et al. Eur J Vasc Endovasc Surg, 2021). This tool has been used both within and outside the VA nationally and internationally with over 12,000 confirmed views across 1,267 unique users from 46 countries including the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, China, Australia, Puerto Rico, Denmark, France, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, and more. The tool is currently being translated through VHA electronic health record integration to be made available for all

- VA providers at the point of patient care.
- **Prosthetic Engineering:** Making prostheses more lifelike can improve the mobility of Veterans with lower limb amputations. CLiMB investigators have developed and patented a new prosthetic foot that more closely mimics the behavior of the natural limb. This novel prosthetic foot is featured in the 2023 Federal Laboratory Consortium planning calendar (June). Download yours at 2023_FLC-Planner_Web.pdf (federallabs.org).
- **Patient-centered prosthesis prescription:** There is typically limited opportunity for patient input to the prosthetic prescription process. CLiMB investigators are studying a novel, patient-centered “test-drive” strategy for prosthetic foot prescription using a robotic prosthetic foot emulator programmed to mimic different commercial prosthetic feet. This research, for which CLiMB investigators won the 2022 Howard R. Thranhardt Lecture Award from the American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists for the “best Orthotics and Prosthetics research conducted in the field each year”, has great potential to improve patient satisfaction and functional outcomes for Veterans with lower limb amputation.

Center of Excellence in Primary Care Education | CoEPCE

VA Puget Sound’s Center of Excellence in Primary Care Education CoE is our facility center for Interprofessional Education, legacy Office of Academic Affiliation Center of Excellence for Primary Care Education. This center drives culture transformation that brings learners out of professional “silos” for innovative interprofessional education and collaborative care, to achieve the mission of teaching trainees to learn to work in and lead teams.

Highlights for Fiscal Year 2022:

- 35 learners of five health professions, including medicine residents, nurse practitioner residents and students, pharmacy residents, psychology interns and fellows, and post-baccalaureate registered nurse residents, and other profession trainees as available.
- Education seminars included:
 - Care of Veterans and Women Veterans.
 - Population panel management, learning tools to assess and monitor chronic health conditions and preventive health.
 - Substance use disorder and chronic pain.
 - Meet Your Colleagues sessions, including dentistry, physical therapy, chiropractic.

- Women’s health.
- Microaggressions and strategies to address
- Suicide prevention and risk assessment.
- Novel rotations, including new intern telemedicine rotation with rural site visits.
- 15 quality improvement projects led by trainees, included themes of racial disparities in hypertension control; telemedicine; access to care, medication management in diabetes and obesity, warm handoffs to mental health.
- Annual all-trainee retreat, trainees work together to create and propose new CoE directions.
- Implemented prior retreat innovation of Primary Care Report, held every two months, with an interprofessional team co-presenting a case.
- CoE Faculty-led QI project during the COVID-19 pandemic to assess teaching and care supervision with virtual patient visits versus in-person patient visits.
 - Developed best practices to enhance quality of virtual care and teaching, and increased proportion of video visits.

VA NEWS:

*Lab studies seek hormone-based obesity treatment
February 11, 2022*

A potent, long-lasting “cousin” of a naturally occurring hormone reduced food intake and body weight in a rat model of obesity, according to results published in September 2021 in the journal “Frontiers in Physiology.”

The researchers say the results “mark a new avenue in anti-obesity drug interventions” and could potentially lead to a safe, effective treatment for the problem, which affects some 4 in 10 Americans.

Dr. James E. Blevins of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System completed the study with colleagues from Seattle Children’s Research Institute; the University of Washington; Harvard Medical School; and OXT Therapeutics, Inc.

The research focused on ASK1476, a human-made peptide with a structure like that of oxytocin.

Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center | GRECC

The Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Centers (GRECCs) are VA geriatric centers of excellence focused on aging. They were established by Congress in 1975 to improve the health and health care of older Veterans. They are located at 20 medical centers across the country, and each is connected with a major research university. The GRECCs have three main missions: (1) To build new knowledge in geriatric care through research; (2) To improve health care for older Veterans through the development of innovative clinical models of care; and (3) To provide training and education on best practices in caring for older adults for students in healthcare disciplines and VA staff.

VA Puget Sound's GRECC at our Seattle campus was established in 1975, and in 1977 at our American Lake campus. Our two sites have always collaborated on research, education and clinical projects. Although the primary research, education and training, clinical demonstration and administration activities takes place at Seattle, GRECC maintains a portion of its clinical consultation, education development and training at American Lake.

Highlight for Fiscal Year 2022:

- Maintained clinical consultative services focused on memory disorders, geriatric endocrinology and medicine. Provided telemedicine appointments to five VA Puget Sound community outpatient clinics to extend the reach of our clinical services.
- Organized two interprofessional seminar series (Geriatric Psychiatry/Medicine Didactics and Allied Health Interprofessional conference) for VA and University of Washington School of Medicine trainees.
- Co-directed the Alzheimer's Disease Training Program, coordinated the Alzheimer's Disease Training Program educational activities and gave didactic lectures on the Alzheimer's disease pathogenesis.
- Through the GRECC Connect (virtual geriatrics) and Geriatric Scholars projects, reached rural providers and their patients. Activities

included practicum experiences; non-visit consultation; telemedicine visits; tele group visits; and consultation with our interdisciplinary team (geriatric pharmacy, social work, nursing, neuropsychology, medicine and psychiatry).

- GRECC/University of Washington School of Medicine collaboration organizes Geriatric Workforce Enhancement CE-granting educational conference (winter and spring series) aimed at providers and trainees across VA Northwest Region (VISN 20) and the UW's School of Medicine's five-state medical education program, including many rural sites. GRECC core faculty also give lectures and contributed to over 3,000 hours provided in staff education. Lectures are recorded and available online, thus providing enduring expert content.
- Continued to train other sites across the country in starting and running Memory Skills Classes for PTSD virtually; patient focused materials continued to be produced.
- Managed development, production, and distribution Brain Health in Aging printed materials.
- Updated "3Ds: Delirium-Dementia-Depression Assessment Guide." The evaluation of the pocket card resulted in publication and nationwide dissemination.
- Supported and chaired key committees/sub-committees, including health care delivery, vaccine operations, Clinical Research Unit, advisory, R&D, research safety, radiation safety, institutional biosafety, R&D seed grant review, and credentialing and privileging.
- Provided a forum for all sites across VA's Northwest Region to discuss clinical initiatives and policy about dementia care as part of VISN 20 Dementia Committee, supported Rehabilitation & Extended Care Integrated Clinical Community (REC ICC) committee.



Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Center of Excellence | ALSCoE

Since 2013, VA Puget Sound's Interdisciplinary Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Center of Excellence (ALSCoE) has delivered timely, effective, and compassionate care for Veterans with ALS and their families across the Northwest region. Our mission is to provide excellent clinical care for Veterans and caregivers affected by ALS, and serve as leaders in developing pathways for innovative, Veteran-centric, interdisciplinary rehabilitative care of ALS. We offer both comprehensive in-person and telehealth services based on the needs and preferences of our patients. Our ALS team guides Veterans living with ALS and their families throughout the journey and assists them in maximizing the various VA benefits available, including coordinated medical care, durable medical equipment, home modification services, support and services to aid in activities of daily living.

Highlights for Fiscal Year 2022:

- Dr. Ileana Howard, medical co-director of the ALS Center at VA Puget Sound, accepted the role of chair of the ALS Executive Committee for the Veteran Health Administration. In this role, she is facilitating implementation of the new VHA ALS System of Care directive and helping build a community of practice across the country to disseminate the best evidence-based care for Veterans with ALS.
- Dr. Howard was recognized with a national Advocacy award by the American Association of Neuromuscular and Electrodiagnostic Medicine for her role in championing high quality care for Veterans with ALS.
- Through funding secured by the Office of Rural Health, the VA Puget Sound ALS Team expanded staffing for tele-ALS to now include remote specialty respiratory therapy virtual care for Veterans unable to attend the clinic due to distance or disability.
- ALS team coordinated a site visit with the Spokane ALS medical team to the Steve Gleason Neuroscience Institute, St. Luke's Rehabilitation hospital, and Matt's Place foundation, a non-profit run by a local Veteran with ALS. This visit helped strengthen ties between our VA teams and community partners across Washington state.

ON FOREFRONT OF INNOVATION

VA Puget Sound Health Care System is home to VA Ventures, a National Center for Innovation that is accelerating innovation through collaborations within the VA, as well as intergovernmental, academic and industry partnerships. VA Ventures is an FDA registered manufacturing facility, and the flagship site for the Office of Advanced Manufacturing (OAM), a national program to develop, manufacture and deliver patient-specific healthcare solutions to Veterans and their care providers.

Notable achievements this fiscal year, include:

- VA Ventures receiving U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) 510(k) clearance for the Oromaxillofacial Advanced Surgical Planning (OMF ASP) System, which is the first 510(k) cleared device for VHA as both the developer and manufacturer. The OMF ASP System is a virtual surgical planning service that provides patient specific 3D printed surgical guides and anatomical models for jaw reconstructive surgeries. VA Ventures will support this service and production of the 3D printed guides, templates, and anatomical models at our FDA registered manufacturing facility at Fort Lawton. The OMF ASP team is currently in the process of rolling out this new product to surgeons at VAPS and the Minneapolis VA and will be expanding availability nationally to other VA medical centers in Fiscal Year 2023.

- The development of a VHA Radiotherapy Bolus; a Class II, FDA regulated medical device, helps control the radiation dose received by Veterans undergoing external beam radiation therapy for cancer treatment. VHA Radiotherapy Boluses are designed by radiation therapy professionals for a unique patient and are intended to modify the shape of a beam from a radiation therapy source. The development team at VA Ventures has been building and refining the manufacturing processes for this product, and has a FDA 510(k) application submitted and under review. VA Ventures has been working with our local radiation therapy clinical team, as well as teams at Cleveland and Richmond VA medical centers to ensure this product meets their functional and performance requirements.
- With recent collaboration between VA Ventures and Cleveland VA, the team has implemented a pathway for VA clinicians to order pre-procedural models at any VHA facility. This workflow allows VA provider to utilize EHR system and request any product currently in manufacturing portfolio. In addition, VA Ventures co-hosted a VHA town hall with the National Surgery Office (NSO) October 24. This town hall focused on surgical applications utilizing advanced manufacturing technologies. This was the second town hall in a series working to connect clinicians and other stakeholders to advanced manufacturing resources and potential solutions to Veteran's care. The town hall featured engineering experts partnering with VA clinicians to provided practical clinical examples of VHA's evolving successes with advanced manufacturing technology. The event included break-out sessions for smaller group discussions including surgical oncology applications, pre-procedural models, the OMF ASP surgical marking guides for reconstructive surgery, and abnormal anatomy applications.
- Partnering with FDA (MOU 225-22-025) to develop regulatory science tools to foster advancements in the spaces of automation, telemedicine, and personalized health care. This focus will have an impact in addressing medical needs in underserved rural populations by promoting the ability to monitor and treat patients with advanced health care outside the walls of a hospital. This collaboration will yield metrics, training, protocols and programs for medical device products that utilize emerging technologies, including medical products that are manufactured close to the patient at the "point of care." These emerging technologies may include, wearable technologies, 5G, immersive technologies, artificial intelligence, and additive manufacturing as well as utilizing VA Ventures one of a kind OR2050 platform to test and evaluate medical devices. During this collaboration the VA and FDA will jointly develop a portfolio of regulatory science tools, training, and research outcomes that ensure Veterans have access to the most innovative medical solutions and technologies to support their care. An initial project in wearable technologies and patient monitoring systems is currently underway.
- The VA Ventures team, with the help of the VA Puget Sound's Facilities Management Services (FMS) team, has been establishing its medical device development and manufacturing facility at the Fort Lawton VHA campus located at Discovery Park. This 70,000 sq. ft. facility provides development and collaborative office spaces and a newly renovated manufacturing space, home to multiple additive manufacturing production lines. The VA Ventures Operations team relocated manufacturing equipment, materials, and supplies from the VA Puget Sound's Seattle campus and are currently performing equipment qualification and validation. The re-purposed Fort Lawton facility enhances the team's ability to create an efficient FDA registered medical device manufacturing site to serve our Veterans by providing cutting edge Point of Care medical device manufacturing and development to serve the VA nationally. This facility will also co-locate some VA Ventures partners, such as the FDA, as well as four different industry partners. As the next step for expansion, VA Ventures is working closely with FMS team in the hopes of finishing construction at VA Puget Sound main campus in by early 2023.

EXPANDED CARE THROUGH OUR REGIONAL HUBS

Along with caring for Veterans enrolled at one of our facilities, VA Puget Sound offers Veterans from a five-state area in the Pacific Northwest specialized care through our regional hubs:

Blind Rehabilitation

VA Puget Sound's Blind Rehabilitation Center at our American Lake campus is one of 13 in the VA Blind Rehabilitation continuum of care. The center provides comprehensive, individualized rehabilitation services in an inpatient facility by a multidisciplinary team of rehabilitation specialists including blind rehabilitation, nursing, social work, psychology, recreation therapy, and low vision optometry/eye care. Blind Rehabilitation specialists provide assessment and therapeutic instruction in orientation and mobility, activities of daily living, assistive technology, adaptive vision skills and manual skills therapy.

Highlights:

- Provides inpatient blind rehabilitation for Veterans and active-duty service members with visual impairments from VA's Northwest Network (VISN 20) and Montana.
- Offers outpatient low vision optometry services, care coordination, and blind rehabilitation home training to VA Puget

Sound Veterans through Low Vision Clinic, Visual Impairment Service Team (VIST) Coordinators, and Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists (BROS).

- Provides direct VA Video Connect services as well as training Veterans with vision loss to use telehealth modalities with access technology.

Regional Spinal Cord Injury

VA Puget Sound Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Service provides rehabilitation as well as specialized medical, surgical and primary care for Veterans with new and chronic spinal cord injuries. VA Puget Sound serves as the regional hub site for nine VA health care systems in Veterans Integrated Services Networks 20 and 19 which encompasses the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountains, providing care to over 900 Veterans living with SCI.

During fiscal year 2022, SCI Service collaborated with Northwest Paralyzed Veterans of America to develop a pilot program to provide peer mentorship to Veterans with SCI. The SCI Rehabilitation Program received a 3-year

accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). The service completed design for an expansion and renovation of the SCI Unit, with anticipation to receive construction funding in Fiscal Year 2023. Staff from the SCI Service participated in support of the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic and other VA adaptive sports programs.

Regional Amputation Center

VA Puget Sound's Regional Amputation Center (RAC) is one of seven hubs in the VA's national Amputation System of Care, overseeing the care of Veterans with limb loss in VISNs 20 and 22, and directly serving over 900 Veterans with major limb loss. Our mission is to provide excellent, state-of-

the-art, holistic, interdisciplinary care to the Veteran with limb loss. Our team works with Veterans to help them prepare for amputation and provides lifelong rehabilitation care after amputation.

Program Highlights:

- Provides specialized care for highly complex cases in region.
- Houses an amputation rehabilitation fellowship to help grow the subspecialty of amputation rehabilitation. Graduates of the program have helped spread best practices in amputation rehabilitation to other VA facilities and to civilian health care systems.
- Provides education and support for other clinicians in region.
- Provides leadership for multiple national education and program development initiatives.



Marrow Transplant Unit

VA Puget Sound's Marrow Transplant Unit was founded in 1982. Together with the VA program in Nashville, it provides comprehensive hematopoietic stem cell transplantation services for Veterans with a variety of malignant and nonmalignant hematologic disorders. Since inception through September 30, 2022, the Marrow Transplant Unit has surpassed 1,900 transplants, including over 240 from unrelated donors. Utilizing eight inpatient beds and one outpatient suite, approximately 60-70 transplants are performed annually. Seattle patients receive either their own (autologous) stem cells or products from a matched or closely-matched relative or unrelated donor (allogeneic) as well as half-matched family members (haploidentical allogeneic). Allogeneic transplant recipients, especially those with mismatched and unrelated donor sources, require prolonged immunosuppression and are at risk for a variety of complications. Immunologic tolerance requires close medical surveillance for months to years. The longitudinal follow-up care and clinical advice provided by the Seattle program is key to successful outcomes for patients referred by VA centers throughout the country.

The largest proportion of Veterans treated in Seattle continue to receive transplants for multiple myeloma, followed by a number of hematopoietic malignancies and less commonly autoimmune diseases. Multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and chronic lymphocytic leukemia can be service connected conditions for Veterans with prior Agent Orange exposure.

Clinical research performed at the Marrow Transplant Unit in conjunction with Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center has led to improved efficacy and safety of hematopoietic stem cell transplantation, making curative treatments available to an increased number of patients. Outcome data for Veterans transplanted at VA Puget Sound compares favorably to published data in the medical literature and national registries.

Lung Transplant Program

The Lung Transplant Program at VA Puget Sound Health Care System provides comprehensive evaluation and management of Veterans with advanced lung disease referred for lung transplantation. It is a collaborative program with the University of Washington lung transplant program. Veterans are referred to the VA Program from VA facilities throughout the U.S. and are listed for lung transplantation at the University of Washington. Lung transplant surgery occurs at the University of Washington Medical Center and patients are typically transferred to VA Puget Sound to complete inpatient care within five days after transplantation. After discharge, patients remain in Seattle post-transplant for a minimum of three months for recovery before returning home. Longer term care in collaboration with each Veteran's home VA with regular follow-up visits with the Seattle program via telemedicine or in-person. Transplant care at VA Puget Sound Seattle Campus is multidisciplinary and relies upon outstanding local expertise and collaboration by pulmonary medicine, thoracic surgery, internal medicine, medical and surgical specialties, radiology, pathology, laboratory medicine, social work, mental health and nursing.

Since inception in 2012, 60 patients have undergone transplantation through the Seattle VA program. Common indications for lung transplantation in the VA program are pulmonary fibrosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Veterans have the option of transplant referral to any of the three VA lung transplant programs (Seattle, WA; Madison, WI, West Roxbury, MA) or to non-VA community centers. Approximately 2,500 lung transplants are performed annually in the United States. Nationally, survival after lung transplantation, as reported in the surgical registry of transplant recipients (SRTR), is 90 percent at one year and 75

VA PUGET SOUND STORY:

*VA Puget Sound making life easier for nursing moms—debuts lactation pods
March 28, 2022*

Today VA Puget Sound Health Care System became home to freestanding lactation pods designed to give nursing mothers a private and convenient place to breastfeed and pump.

"VA Puget Sound has the largest, and fastest growing Women Veterans' Program in the Northwest health network," said Veterans Integrated Services Network 20 Director Dr. Teresa Boyd. "VA Puget Sound's new lactation pods are another way it is supporting women Veterans who served our country, and the staff who care for them."

VA Puget Sound's Women's Health Program has more than 17,000 women enrolled for care.

percent at three years. Survival in the VA Puget Sound program has been 97 percent at one year and 95 percent at three years with median waiting time for transplant of 3.2 months. In addition to its local expertise and support, VA Puget Sound's ability to provide continuous, unfragmented post-transplant care throughout the country is a major contributor to outstanding outcomes for our Veteran population.

Polytrauma Network Site

The Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 20 Polytrauma Network Site (PNS), located at our Seattle campus, is part of an integrated network of specialized rehabilitation programs dedicated to serving Veterans and service members with both combat and civilian related traumatic brain injury (TBI) and polytrauma. The PNS provides post-acute, interdisciplinary rehabilitation services. The PNS also provides consultation and training

and is a referral site for other Polytrauma programs across Alaska, Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

Program Highlights:

- During the fiscal year, PNS had 152 Veterans with a history of moderate-to-severe TBI enrolled for lifetime care and case management. PNS received 241 referrals for concussion/TBI screening evaluations.
- Polytrauma has continued to offer care in multiple rehabilitations specialties via both telehealth and in-person to meet our patients' needs. Unique telehealth offerings include telehealth memory and attention classes, tele neuropsychology, and virtual home safety evaluations.
- The Polytrauma Clinic has collaborated with Whole Health providers in RCS to stand up a Long COVID clinic to meet the needs of Veterans struggling with prolonged symptoms after COVID-19 infection. This clinic has received almost 150 referrals to date.

INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESS | IDEA

Through our diversity and inclusion programs, VA Puget Sound is growing a diverse workforce and cultivating an inclusive work environment, where our staff are fully engaged and empowered to deliver the outstanding services to our nation's Veterans and their families.

Our staff-driven Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access (IDEA) committee promotes these practices within the workforce and in clinical practice across all areas of the organization.

VA Puget Sound's DEIC studied the survey results and subsequently formed four sub-committees to address the concerns raised: (1) communication, (2) data, (3) education, training and hiring and (4) retention. Additionally, there are at least 14 active grassroots DEI committees and workgroups engaging in this work aimed at supporting exceptionally equitable and an inclusive work environment that is healthy for employees and meets the needs of all the Veterans we serve.

In response to approximately 2,000 employees who participated in the first annual climate survey, the IDEA committee established the following:

- Listening sessions, presentations, launch of IDEA SharePoint and development of an educational resource repository as employee resources.
- Ongoing employee spotlights, showcasing employees from diverse population groups.



- Partnership with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to examine ongoing inequities with employees.
- Facility level representation at the regional level, with the VISN 20 IDEA Council.
- Regular consultation with VISN 20 high reliability organization leaders on including DEI considerations in messaging.
- Partnership with other institutions supporting Veterans to address equity and inclusion across the systems that Veterans use in King County.
- Implementation of IDEA 101 training in collaboration with Seattle Institute for Biomedical and Clinical Research.

Other programs include:

- For Veterans:
 - LGBTQ+ Program
 - Women Veterans Health Committee
- Staff:
 - Hispanic Heritage
 - Black Employment
 - Disability
 - Asian Pacific Islanders
 - Native American
 - Federally Employed Women
 - LGBTQ+



FOSTERING IDEAS TO BETTER SERVE VETERANS

Fiscal Year 2022 builds on successful programs and pathways implemented during the preceding three years, leveraging the now mature VA Puget Sound Process Improvement Network to support and catalog an additional 80 improvement projects started from scratch. With some projects beginning and others ending, VA Puget Sound maintains a steady state of roughly 100-120 active works at any given time, a measure that has remained surprisingly stable throughout the past three years.

One particularly noteworthy project among these 80 was the Vax the Max campaign to increase administration of the COVID-19 vaccine to hospitalized Veterans. This project enlisted the assistance of resident physicians and medical students from our academic affiliate to approach veterans about the vaccine and counsel them on its risks and benefits. A novel gamification framework was used to harness team vs. team competition for a noble cause, and this project led to measured wellness gains among the participating learners as well. In total, more than 200 shots were administered as part of this campaign, and it will shortly join eight other projects accepted this year for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Besides COVID-19 vaccination, projects have touched on other similarly important topics such as medication safety, substance abuse and social determinants of health, racial and gender disparities, workplace violence, and staff wellness. VA Puget Sound's improvement ecosystem remains vibrant and a source of tremendous internal pride as well as external recognition. The improvement infrastructure that we have been laying since 2019, paired with outstanding enrichment opportunities in the form of Systems Redesign Lean training for staff and our superlative Chief Residency in Quality & Safety (CRQS) program for clinical trainees, has yielded sizeable gains for hospital operations and substantial enhancement of our academic affiliation with the University of Washington (UW). In fact, the VA CRQS program director for Internal Medicine received the prestigious Gene Peterson Award for Excellence in Quality Improvement Mentorship from UW Graduate Medical Education this past year.

COMMUNITY HOUSING & OUTREACH SERVICES PROGRAM AND JUSTICE OUTREACH

- Staff: 140 full-time multi-disciplinary team members, including social workers, addiction counselors, physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, occupational therapists, housing specialists, peer support specialists, and administrative support.
- Grant and Per Diem (GPD):
 - Five Transitional housing programs offering all 5 models of care with a total of 166 beds.
 - One Transition-in-Place housing program model with 20 units.
- Emergency Housing: 2 Contracted Residential Services programs with a total of 32 beds.
 - New solicitation for medical respite care is pending release for a fiscal year 2023 award.
- Drop-In Services: Seattle-based Community Resource & Referral Center offering short-term case management services and support.
 - Expanded walk-in hours to five-days per week
 - Expanded services to include showers and laundry service
 - Expanded on-site Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team (HPACT) services to four half-days per week
 - Expansion of homeless walk-in clinic services to Seattle medical center and American Lake campus.
- National Call Center for Homeless Veterans: Outreach social workers responded to 1,667 Homeless Call Center calls (up 51 percent from the prior year), offering local information and resources to Veterans who are homeless or are at risk for homelessness.
- Answered 556 hospital-based consults (up 9 percent from the prior year): Outreach social workers respond to consults initiated by VA providers, offering local information and resources to Veterans who identify as homeless during medical/mental health appointments.
- HUD-VASH: approximately 2,700 HUD-VASH vouchers are distributed by 12 public housing authorities across 11 counties.
 - Four new HUD-VASH project based programs opened with 40 new units across the region.
 - Eight new HUD-VASH project based programs are projected to open in FY 23, adding 130 units to our portfolio.
- Veterans Justice Programs: Eight Veteran Treatment Courts across five counties.
- Rideshare partnership was expanded for 10 years: homeless programs staff can access this resource for Veterans in need of transportation assistance to medical and housing appointments.
- H-PACT: expansion of programming to the new Community Clinic in Everett, bringing our third HPACT clinic into service.

CARE EXPERIENCE A PRIORITY

VA Puget Sound's priority is to ensure the best Veteran care experience. Our Patient Experience Office is charged with understanding the experiences of all those who served in uniform, and are served by VA. With these insights we are building a world-class patient experience by keeping our Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors at the center of everything we do.

In Fiscal Year 2022 the Patient Experience Service Line addressed a variety of trends. First, the Patient Advocate Team ushered in the integration of the V-Signals Survey results with the Patient Advocate Tracking System (PATS). This integration enabled the passage of Veteran concerns from the survey response directly to the patient advocates through PATS to allow faster service recovery and improved outcomes for patients. The V-Signals integration to PATS is the most recent of many new sources of Veteran feedback that are now entered into the PATS database for action automatically. This both records and speeds the actions taken to improve overall patient experience and positive outcomes.

Additionally, and likely most significant, the team focused attention on improving access to community care by dedicating two patient advocates to assist the Community Care Office with referral management improvements and dedicated management of billing inquiries. These efforts have reduced the time needed to resolve community billing issues and has initiated coordination with community providers to instruct them on the correct billing protocols to avoid future billing errors. The advocates continue to support the Community Care Office to further evolve the improvements to community care referral management.

The Patient Experience Team also contributed to improved patient outcomes through the VA Puget Sound Chaplain, fully implemented iPads for Patients project. This project, led by Chaplain Charles Barnes, procured forty iPads for use by inpatient Veterans to better communicate with their families during their hospital stay. This project provided much needed access to communications and improved patient satisfaction during a lengthy period of COVID-19 visitation restrictions.

Continuing to promote women's health, the Patient Experience Office, in coordination with the Women's Health Program and Public Affairs, facilitated two women's health town halls. These special focus town hall events centered on women's health issues and access. These events provide a public forum for women Veterans to voice their questions and concerns about their care and to share important new information pertinent to our growing population of women Veterans.

MY EVERETT NEWS:

*VA Puget Sound's Everett Clinic Now Accepting Appointments
August 23, 2022*

In what will be a big deal for the 30,000 Veterans who live within a 30-minute drive, the new Everett Community-Based Outpatient Clinic is now accepting appointments to see patients in-person starting September 19th.

The new \$10 million, 28,000 square foot clinic is located at 220 Olympic Boulevard in Everett, Washington.

We had a chance today to get a sneak peek and tagged along with Congressman Rick Larsen for a brief tour.

QUALITY CARE AT OUR CORE

- The Joint Commission Gold Seal
- ALS Association Certified Treatment Center of Excellence
- Ascellon Community Living Center Accredited
- American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's Get With The Guidelines® Target: Stroke Gold Plus and Target: Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll quality achievement awards
- Commission on Cancer Care Accredited
- CARF accredited programs:
 - Community Housing and Outreach Services
 - Community Reintegration Services (employment services)
 - Mental Health Intensive Case Management
 - Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Program (domiciliary)
 - Homeless Care
 - PTSD
 - Substance Abuse
 - Compensated Work Therapy/ Transitional Residence
 - Pain Program
 - Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center
 - Rehabilitation Care Services
 - Inpatient Rehabilitation
 - Amputation Specialty Program
 - Stroke Specialty Program



- Blind Rehabilitation
- Spinal Cord Injury Unit
- Patient Aligned Care Team performance measures
 - 41.04 percent of our Veterans see the same primary care provider each visit.
 - 29.86 percent of Veteran visits received care by phone.
 - 18.92 percent of same-day appointments.
 - 69.57 percent of patients get an appointment within 7 days of their preference.

PRIMARY CARE FOR VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Our Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team (HPACT) has continued to serve vulnerable Veterans throughout Puget Sound, connecting to Veterans who are both currently homeless and continuing to support those now in housing. Our tightly integrated teams of nurses, doctors and social workers work closely with community partners, connecting with homeless Veterans and providing on-site care at shelters, day centers and encampments. This care might include a full medical visit including medications to manage heart failure or an infection, complex wound care, mental health support, or connection to housing and other social work supports.

With an understanding that housing first is not housing only, and a recognition that health challenges don't end when a lease is signed, HPACT and VA housing programs have continued to partner to expand services to Veterans in permanent supportive housing. Regular visits

from an addiction medicine trained physician, as well as a psychiatric nurse practitioner from the VASH program, have increased the engagement of Veterans in substance use and mental health care. In addition, VA housing programs has brought on board an occupational therapist who helps aging or otherwise struggling Veterans adapt to their homes.

VA Puget Sound HPACT also successfully piloted a 12-week program to use evidence-based contingency management to improve the care of Veterans struggling with heart failure from stimulant use. By the end of the program, Veterans were more likely to be regularly taking the medications needed to keep them safe, and less likely to need emergent care. More importantly, Veterans involved in the pilot reported high satisfaction with the program and volunteered that they better understood their health conditions. Several specifically asked that the program be expanded for other Veterans. This innovative care has been shared nationally with other VA programs.

VA Puget Sound was also awarded two mobile medical vans by the national HPACT program, coming on line in the summer of 2023, allowing us to better support outreach. We also look forward to establishing a brand-new Everett based team in 2023 and using a mobile van to improve outreach to Veterans living homeless in more rural areas of Snohomish County.



MAKING CARE MORE CONVENIENT AND ACCESSIBLE

VA Puget Sound has more than 155,000 Veterans enrolled at one of our care sites across Western Washington—from Mount Vernon to Olympia. The VA's Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) report – which was a comprehensive review of all of VA's health assets and infrastructure across the nation – reflects VA Puget Sound's growth of another 8,000 enrolled Veterans in the next seven years. And that is in addition to the thousands of additional Veterans who may be eligible for care under The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.

Changes over the last few years and those that will take place over the next decade are part of VA Puget Sound's ongoing efforts to make getting care for our largest Veteran populations more convenient and support our larger system redesign announced December 4, 2020.

On August 30, 2022, Senator Patty Murray joined our celebration of our new \$10 million, 28,000 sq. ft. in Everett—further proof of our commitment to our Veterans. While it physically opened for patient care October 3, virtual care was in place since November 1, 2021. The clinic was designed with its Patient Aligned Care Teams at the heart of facility. It has 32 exam rooms—two are dedicated for women's health and one is a bariatric procedure room. Services include primary care (in-clinic, home-based and homeless), laboratory services, behavioral health, social work, clinical pharmacy specialists, radiology (CT, MRI, Ultrasound, echocardiogram), virtual care and nutrition. Future specialty care is expected to include cardiology, musculoskeletal, podiatry, urology, gynecology, wound/ostomy care, dermatology, vascular surgery, lung cancer screening, hand, rehabilitation services, and prosthetics and orthotics. Additionally, we expect to offer the Prevention of Amputation in Veterans



Everywhere Program which is a podiatry specialty clinic aimed at preventing or delaying limb loss as well as caring for Veterans who have had amputations.

VA Puget Sound's Everett clinic is part of a larger system redesign to better serve Western Washington Veterans. In addition to this new state-of-the-art clinic, last year we opened new clinics in Olympia, Puyallup and Edmonds in 2021.

Additionally, in August 2022, VA Puget Sound began weekly Mobile Medical Unit visits on Wednesdays to Chehalis to care for local patients there.

Plans include moving VA Puget Sound's Mount Vernon clinic to a newer, state-of-the-art site, and replacing its existing clinic in Olympia with a larger, more centralized multi-specialty clinic in 2026.

VA Puget Sound's new American Lake Specialty Care Building is expected to open in 2028, creating more capacity for primary and specialty care programs and services.

Finally, we will eventually replace our new Everett Clinic with a larger Everett medical center with

services like those at American Lake—including a new community living center.

Together, this new clinical footprint allows VA Puget Sound to directly serve Everett and Olympia, two major metropolitan areas in Western Washington that did not previously have VA facilities.

These efforts also create new capacity for our areas of highest growth in South King and Pierce counties as well as provide better outreach to rural Veterans in North King County with clinics planned in Auburn and the Northeast King County areas.

The expanded primary and specialty care services across our Western Washington care sites are designed to complement the community care options available to Veterans under the MISSION Act.

Most important, VA Puget Sound's new clinics and enhancements to existing facilities are designed to place the needs of our Veterans front and center and underscore our commitment to caring for both their physical and mental health care needs.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION

In May 2018, VA Puget Sound Health Care System and Mann-Grandstaff (Spokane) VA Medical Center were identified as the Initial Operating Capability (IOC) sites for the implementation of Cerner as our new Electronic Health Record (EHR) platform to help to ensure complete and accurate health records are shared seamlessly across VA, Department of Defense, and community providers. Since then, VA Puget Sound staff have worked with Electronic Health Record Modernization – Integration Office (EHRM-IO), Oracle/Cerner, and colleagues around the country to prepare the site for deployment, collaborate on configuration work for the new nationally standardized EHR, and make significant contributions to the deployment process that benefit future EHR deployment sites.

In Fiscal Year 2022, VA Puget Sound had three different planned go-live dates with preparations started and stopped each time. These preparations affect all staff: supervisors planning coverage during training, staff work and leave schedules shifting, or directly participating in data collection or configuration work. As we begin Fiscal Year 2023, all site deployments have been postponed until at least mid-2023. VA leadership has begun an “assess

and address” period for known patient safety issues that have affected sites already live with the new EHR. This course correction shows that VA continues to make patient safety, staff efficiency, and veteran experience top priorities.

For VA Puget Sound staff, this means we can shift our focus to other efforts for several months and have a new start to our EHRM deployment activities tentatively in October 2023 to prepare for a late summer/early fall 2024 go-live. Many staff will continue their work on workflows that are not yet implemented or need significant revision to operate well at a complex VA site such as VA Puget Sound. Other VA Puget Sound staff will contribute to the national work to evaluate and improve the EHR.

VA Puget Sound is proud to have been at the forefront of this massive project. Our staff have done amazing work, applying their expertise to complex changes in how we do our work. We have worked through and created scores of new workflows for complex sites. We covered new territory in how Health Professions Trainees and Research programs continue their work in the context of this deployment. We discovered and then improved how the actual deployment process works for future sites (e.g., local workshops, user role assignments, training planning, etc.). This experience has been and will be better because of VA Puget Sound’s hard work and expertise. We will continue to pay it forward in support of the national project.



MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE PREVENTION A CONTINUED PRIORITY

Suicide prevention continues to be a top priority across the VA. The most current VA data reports show that from 2019 to 2020, there were consecutive reductions, of 307 and 343 suicides across the VA population, an unprecedented decrease since 2001. From 2018 - 2020, adjusted suicide rates for Veterans fell by 9.7%. By continuing to make suicide prevention everyone’s business, we are committing ourselves to reaching out to those Veterans in need of behavioral health assessment and treatment.

With more than 4,400 Veteran Crisis Line (VCL) consults in Fiscal Year 2022, VA Puget Sound was the third most frequent VCL referral site, nationally, with more than three times the VA average number of crisis line referrals. The steady increase in the number of referrals received from the Veteran’s Crisis Line suggests that the VA Puget Sound Veteran community is aware of—and willing to utilize—this important entry point for VA mental health services. And the suicide prevention team prioritizes responsiveness to these calls, making an outreach attempt to 99.7 percent of those consults in less than 24 hours, and successfully contacting 92.5 percent of those Veterans within three days of receiving the consult.

At any given time, VA Puget Sound works closely with an average of 115 Veterans who have been determined to be at particularly high clinical risk for suicide via the High-Risk Flag Program. Nearly

100 additional Veterans who have been identified as extremely high statistical risk for suicide are also closely monitored to ensure suicide risk is actively managed.

Regular caring contact is made with all Veterans whose high-risk flags have been removed in the last 12 months. Caring contacts are also offered to Veterans who discharge from VA Puget Sound’s High Acuity Inpatient Psychiatric Unit, and they are sent to many additional Veterans identified by the REACH VET suicide prevention program. For Fiscal Year 2022, more than 2,000 caring cards were sent to Veterans across the region, offering an additional path for staying connected to care.

The Suicide Prevention Team is also heavily engaged in the ongoing education of our providers and partners who serve Veterans. Over the past two years, we have provided training on suicide prevention best practices to more than 700 providers who work with Veterans, both inside and outside of the VA. In addition, over Fiscal Year 2022, more than 60 in-person and virtual outreach events were held, reaching more than 4,939 Veterans, family members, and community agencies directly. This includes a suicide prevention training specifically focused on indigenous Veterans across the Puget Sound region that is currently being adopted and tailored to indigenous communities served by other VA facilities across the country.

VA PUGET SOUND PRESS RELEASE:

VA Puget Sound nationally recognized for its commitment to providing high-quality stroke care for third consecutive year

June 17, 2022

For the third year in a row, VA Puget Sound Health Care System received the American Heart Association Association’s Get With The Guidelines® Target: Stroke Gold Plus and Target: Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll quality achievement awards.

“We are incredibly pleased to recognize VA Puget Sound Health Care System for its commitment to caring for patients with stroke,” said Stroke System of Care Advisory Group Chairperson Steven Messe, M.D. “Participation in Get With The Guidelines is associated with improved patient outcomes, fewer readmissions and lower mortality rates – a win for health care systems, families and communities.”

PAIN MANAGEMENT OPIOID REDUCTION PAIN TELEHEALTH

VA Puget Sound Health Care System Pain Clinics (Seattle and American Lake campuses) offer comprehensive pain care services to address complex chronic pain. Treatment options available to Veterans include co-disciplinary visits with a medical practitioner and psychologist simultaneously, pain psychotherapy groups, individual pain psychotherapy, complementary and integrative approaches, pain procedures, opioid tapering, and intensive pain rehabilitation services through the outpatient functional restoration program.

Collaboration across pain and specialties clinics is an important tenet of both comprehensive pain care and opioid safety, including the Pain Management/Opioid Safety Committee, Opioid Safety Program, and Stepped Care for Opioid Use Disorder Train the Trainer (SCOUTT) program. In addition, the clinic has emphasized clinician education through the Pain Mini Residency Program, University of Washington School of Medicine student rotations, pain/anesthesia residency and fellowship programs, pain psychology internships and fellowships, and social work training program.

Fiscal Year 2022 highlights:

- Awarded new Whole Health funding to significantly increase our complementary and integrative health modalities for pain. New positions include: four massage therapists, two acupuncturists, two yoga instructors, two advanced telehealth clinical technicians, two, plus one part time Advance Practice Providers. Despite pandemic-limited in person care, increased Whole Health care in the Pain Clinic by 121 percent in Fiscal Year 2022 (4,267 visits).
- Awarded new national VA funding for Active Management of Pain, Medication Management in Pain Management Teams and Mental Health Integration into Pain Clinics Request for Applications. These efforts will add eight new clinical employees to support pain management efforts at VA Puget Sound.
- Awarded more than \$300,000 for new equipment and other Pain Clinic improvements.
- VISN20—VA's Northwest Network—TelePain Program, integrated with the Clinical Resource Hub. New funding and staffing will expand the program to include all VISN20 sites. The enhanced program will add medication management services for chronic pain and opioid use disorder.
- Developed two new training programs at VA Puget Sound (American Psychological Association-accredited Behavioral Medicine and Pain Psychology fellowship track; social work Substance Use Disorder/Pain internship).
- Supported 6,277 virtual care encounters to 6,262 unique Veterans.
- Improved clinical coverage responses, including completing 800 procedure consults, 1,562 comprehensive pain consults, 74 inpatient consults, and 70 opioid safety consults.
- Multiple quality improvement projects (e.g., improving opioid prescribing safety, mindfulness and pain, measurement-based pain care, Functional Restoration Program, eConsult recommendation integration, virtual reality and pre-procedural anxiety).
- Numerous funded research projects (e.g., integrated treatment for chronic pain and opioid use disorder, chronic knee pain clinical trial, IMPROVE, POSITIVE, COPES EXTRA, QUERI/COIN, career development award).
- Workgroup continues to complete Stratification Tool for Opioid Risk Mitigation STORM reports (increasing by more than 53 percent; 290 in past fiscal year) and recommendations to service the facility in supporting very high-risk Veterans treated with opioids and those who are not prescribed opioids but are otherwise at very high risk.
- Increased non-visit eConsults completed by more than 20% (354 in fiscal year), with pain recommendations provided both within the facility and for other sites within the Northwest Network (primarily Alaska).
- Awarded full three-year Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accreditation in October 2021, underscoring VA Puget Sound's commitment to continually improving services, encouraging feedback, and serving the community.
- Assisted facility in achieving national goals for Prescription Drug Monitoring Program metrics.
- Coordinated facility-wide response and obtained closeout of Office of Inspector General Long Term Opioid Therapy facility findings in a timely fashion.
- Continued to improve facility-level dispensing of naloxone to Veterans diagnosed with opioid use disorder to 64.6 percent, exceeding national goals in multiple metrics.

VOLUNTEERS A CRITICAL PART OF OUR TEAM

While continuing to work under ongoing COVID restrictions during Fiscal Year 2022, VA Puget Sound's Center for Development and Civic Engagement, or CDCE, (formerly known as VA Voluntary Service) staff, received nearly \$265,000 of monetary and non-monetary donations for direct Veteran patient benefit while collaborating with local and regional Veteran Service Organization partners to enhance our Veteran patients' experiences.

Throughout the year, national CDCE leadership rolled-out new facets to the new online database and expectations for use as part of the program to safeguard volunteer personal information. The VA Puget Sound team continued to fully embrace these new practices while working to ease volunteer transition into the new system. To ensure their ability to swiftly navigate the new set-up, the team developed step-by-step tools mapping out the most efficient way to record hours and print meal tickets as well as working individually with each volunteer on how to navigate the new two-step ID verification process.

Most encouraging of all, with a tradition of service going back more than 75 years, local volunteers continued returning to their posts. Volunteer color guards performed military burial honors at Tahoma National Cemetery. VA Puget Sound Red Coat Ambassadors welcomed and assisted Veterans and visitors at the American Lake and Seattle campuses from volunteer courtesy desks. Volunteer drivers assisted Veterans with appointment-related travel needs from as far north as the Canadian Border all the way south of Olympia, to the entirety of the Olympic Peninsula stretching over to the western side of the mighty Cascades. In these ways, and in so many more, VA Puget Sound CDCE staff continue to bring volunteers and Veteran patients together.



NURTURING OUR NATION'S FUTURE MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

As a world class affiliated teaching hospital, VA Puget Sound continues to provide a full range of services, with state-of-the-art technology as well as education and research. Our academic partners play an invaluable role in driving innovation and collaborative research to improve health outcomes for not only the Veterans entrusted to us, but to help people worldwide.

VA Puget Sound began partnering with the University of Washington School of Medicine in 1951, primarily in the fields of medical, dental, nursing, mental health, and social work. Since then, VA Puget Sound has added other physician affiliation agreements with Madigan Army Medical Center, Swedish Hospital, Seattle Children's Hospital and Washington State University's Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine. These future professionals are the nation's health care workforce pipeline who will go on to care for Veterans and other patients in urban and rural communities across the U.S.

VA Puget Sound takes pride in our 70-year history of positive advancements and cutting-edge academic partnership and achievements that continue to improve health outcomes for the Veterans we care for. Our academic collaborations build on our passion to learn and power to heal.

In academic year 2022, VA Puget Sound trained over 1,600 health care professionals—from physicians, dentists and nurses to psychologists and social workers. Through its more than 130 active associated health, graduate medical and dental education and, nursing undergraduate, graduate, and research affiliations in Pacific Northwest and beyond, VA Puget Sound offers innovation and

progressive training. And its collaborations with the University of Washington School of Medicine and Seattle Institute for Biomedical and Clinical Research are integral to ongoing discoveries.

During the pandemic, VA facilities such as VA Puget Sound worked with medical schools, universities, and colleges across the country to utilize health professions trainees to care for Veterans virtually and in-person while completing their training requirements. VA Puget Sound continues to advance health professions training by adding new rotations here at VA Puget Sound's Everett Outpatient Clinic as well as securing a new fellowship in Podiatry's Prevention of Amputation in Veterans Everywhere (PAVE) program. VA Health Professions Education (HPE) programs play a leading role in creating the health care workforce for VA and the Nation. Over 72% of VA podiatrists and psychologists, over 81% of VA optometrists and over 64% of VA physicians participated in VA training programs prior to employment (2021 All Employee Survey Data). Health Professions Trainees contribute substantially to VA's ability to deliver high-quality patient care to Veterans. To learn more about VA's national program, visit www.va.gov/OAA/docs/OAA_Stats_AY_2020_2021_FINAL.pdf.

Nursing Spotlight:
The role of VA Puget Sound's Nursing Education Team is to maintain a highly educated nursing workforce through professional development, competency and skill training implementing evidence-based practice, scope of practice clarification and increasing patient safety. VA Puget Sound offers academic excellence:



- Nursing education has 44 academic affiliations with schools of nursing including University of Washington (Seattle Bothell and Tacoma) Seattle University, Seattle Pacific College, Pacific Lutheran College, Washington State University Gonzaga University and Northwest University.
- As a Northwest Clinical Placement Consortium member, VA Puget Sound is recognized as a premier clinical rotation site for graduate and non-graduate nurses supporting more than 200 graduate and undergraduate nursing students offering unique clinical placements that give students opportunity to work with experienced preceptors including physicians, nurses and others.
- Offering variety of professional development courses and training workshops for clinical nursing staff to enhance competency, confidence to provide career pathways that can enhance retention
- Academic partnerships with Seattle colleges supporting nursing assistants and licensed practice nursing clinical rotations.

VA Puget Sound provides oversight to several nurse residency programs aimed to support, recruit, and retain nurses within our workforce.

- **Post Baccalaureate Registered Residency Program:** In partnership with the University of Washington School of Nursing and OAA, VA Puget Sound received funding and initiated its first program cohort in 2019. Residents recruited are newly graduated Bachelor of Science nurses currently in their first registered nurse role. The residency program offers lifelong learning and the opportunity to move to nursing leadership roles, while providing excellent and compassionate care to our nation's heroes, our Veterans. Areas of work include primary care, mental health and acute care units. Since the first cohort in 2019, the program has trained nine resident The program anticipates Commission Collegiate for Nursing Education accreditation in 2022.
- **VA Learning Opportunities Residency (VALOR):** This 400-hour clinical residency program is for Bachelor of Science in Nursing

students between their junior and senior year. Students are appointed during the summer months and receive a stipend (80 percent of Nurse1/Step1 as defined by Office of Personnel Management Civil Service pay scale). These students continue during their senior academic year and are offered full time positions, with an 80-90 percent employment and retention rate.

Scholarship Opportunities

VA offers academic scholarships to eligible employees pursuing degrees or training in health care disciplines to facilitate recruitment and retention and meet the VA mission of caring for and serving our nation's Veterans

- Employee Incentive Scholarship Program is a scholarship awarded to permanent full- and part-time Veterans Health Administration employees pursuing degrees or training in

health care disciplines for which recruitment and retention of qualified personnel is difficult.

- National Nursing Educational Incentive is a scholarship awarded to permanent full- and part-time VA registered nurses seeking baccalaureate and advanced nursing degrees from an authorized, accredited education program.
- VA National Education for Employee provides scholarship and replacement salary funding to VA facilities to allow certain scholarship participants who are enrolled full-time in an approved education program to accelerate their degree completion by attending school full time.

VA PUGET SOUND STORY:

VA Puget Sound Veteran artists continue streak as national medal winners! February 16, 2022

This year's National Veterans Creative Arts Festival drew more than 1,400 Veteran artists from 118 VA health care facilities across the country. Of the 2,050 submissions, seven VA Puget Sound Health Care System Veterans received top awards—five gold medals, one silver and one bronze.

Jim Anderson, a 46-year-old U.S. Army retiree, took the gold in the woodworking category for the second year with his "No. 2 Celestial Compass." He used 12 different species of domestic and exotic hardwoods and constructed over 35 custom jigs, forms, molds and fixtures to build his second award-winning creation. Each ring has three different species of wood laminated together. He hand cut and shaped all the inlay with 31 pieces of paua shell (abalone) inlay, eight mother of pearl diamonds, and the brass "No. 2" and his signature inlays are mother of pearl. "The most prominent feature is when No. 2 is viewed under a UV/blacklight the three segmented rings made of Yellowheart wood and the core glows," he described.

"I researched, learned, experimented with many basic and advanced woodworking techniques to include steam bent lamination (legs and rings), resawing and machining my own veneer, radial matched and segmented veneering (tabletop), parquetry, woodturning, epoxy casting (spindle core), and hand cut shell inlay," Anderson said. "Part of my inspiration was to combine a few of these skills to create something that was out of this world...and I think I did that. Another part of my inspiration was while I was making one of the components, I found that when held to light, it kind of looked like a black hole. I was flabbergasted by that."

VA PUGET SOUND PRESS RELEASE:

VA Puget Sound again earns national accreditation from the Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons July 18, 2022

The Commission on Cancer, a quality program of the American College of Surgeons, has again granted three-year accreditation to VA Puget Sound Health Care System's cancer program.

"Our national accreditation from the Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons underscores our commitment to providing our Veterans with the best health outcomes," said VA Puget Sound Health Care System Cancer Committee Chair Dr. Michael Porter. "The VA is leading the fight against cancer through precision oncology by developing and applying new technologies, tools, research knowledge, and best-practice therapies. Our scientific and medical breakthroughs are shared both inside and outside our healthcare system to benefit not just Veterans, but all Americans."



GETTING VETERANS OUT THERE DOING WHAT THEY LOVE

Recreation Therapy supports extensive adaptive sports and recreation events, clinics, and opportunities to enhance the health and well-being of our Veterans. These opportunities include the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in partnership with Paralyzed Veterans of America, the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, the National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic and the National Veterans Golden Age Games. Recreation Therapy coordinates and provides a local, virtual art show and competition which lead to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. In addition to these, Recreation Therapy collaborates with other community partners for a variety of adaptive clinics and program offerings including target shooting, golf, pickleball, fishing, tennis, video gaming, softball, curling with the Granite Curling Club, adaptive wake surfing with Wake for Warriors, hiking and snowshoeing with the U.S. Forest Service and others. We look forward to revitalizing additional programs and partnerships as we move closer to a new normal!

VA'S LARGEST WOMEN'S HEALTH PROGRAM IN NORTHWEST REGION



Of our 17,456 enrolled women, 13,328 received care in Fiscal Year 2022. Comprehensive primary care is delivered at all care sites by over 80 women's health primary care providers, offering gender choice of providers, and all sites have two or more. Over 95 percent of women are assigned to a designated women's health provider exceeding national benchmarks. Women Veterans may choose gender integrated care at all sites or receive primary care in our Women's Clinics, with exclusive separate entrances and clinical spaces at American Lake and Seattle. American Lake

offers free childcare (ages 6 weeks to 12-years-old) during appointments. All services available to male veterans are also available for women veterans across primary, specialty, mental health, social work, nutrition, pharmacy and emergent/inpatient care. Additionally, our Women's Health Program ensures in-house full-scope gynecology and care coordination to help navigate breast care, mammography, maternity services, first seven-days of life care for baby, and limited in vitro fertilization, or IVF, in the community.

FISHER HOUSE – A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

VA Puget Sound's Fisher House provides a cost free "home away from home" for Veterans, active-duty service members, their families and caregivers, while they are hospitalized or receiving care. The VA Fisher House team works with other VA Puget Sound support groups to provide a calm and welcoming environment where they can focus on the care of their loved ones. Guests of the VA Puget Sound Fisher House have come from 48 states around the nation, and 14 countries around the globe. VA Puget Sound Fisher House expands its footprint of service availability through VA Puget Sound specialty services, such as Spinal Cord Injury; helping those who come from a distance to feel at home.

COVID-19 caused a significant decline in traveling Veterans, service members, families and caregivers in Fiscal Year 2022.

Families served: 396
 Guests served: 556
 Average length of stay: 9 days
 Cost savings to visiting families: \$346,900

VA NEWS:

*A Puget Sound recognizes Wall of Heroes honorees
 January 8, 2022*

The legendary service of Air Force Colonel Joe Jackson, a VA Puget Sound Health Care System Wall of Heroes 2020 honoree (posthumously), spanned three wars (WWII, Korea and Vietnam). His daughter Bonnie shared some aspects about her father that some may not know.

An auto mechanic by trade, Jackson enlisted in the Army Air Corps in March 1941. Though he started as a plane mechanic, he eventually moved to flying jets, including Air Force U-2 and C-123 aircraft.

He flew more than 100 combat missions in Korea and almost 300 in Vietnam. The latter earned him the Medal of Honor for actions on May 12, 1968, when he helped evacuate Kham Duc while under fire. His medal was presented by President Lyndon B. Johnson at a White House ceremony in 1969.

VA Puget Sound also recognized Dr. Duane Hyde, Army Veteran, as a Wall of Heroes 2021 honoree.

"Thank you for considering me worthy to join this auspicious group of real heroes," said Hyde, 98. "In accepting this honor, I feel like I am a representative of many Vets who performed what they were experienced and trained to do."

Hyde's medical school and subsequent 37-year medical practice included the delivery of more than 1,500 babies.



When Veteran Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough asked Navy Veteran Randy Miller, a patient receiving care at VA Puget Sound Health Care System's Spinal Cord Injury (SCI), how he felt about the care he is receiving he said: "The nurses are angels that have been placed on the earth." The visit by Secretary McDonough and Meg Kabat, VA senior advisor for families, caregiver and survivors to VA Puget Sound October 8, 2022, included tours of the Vaccine Clinic, Community Living Center and SCI, a staff roundtable and a leadership briefing.



CONTACT US


VA Puget Sound Health Care System:
800-329-8387

Seattle Campus:
206-762-1010

American Lake Campus:
253-582-8440

To use teletype for the deaf (TTY) services:
dial 711



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