



“

I joined because I wanted to know what was outside of my life in the world, and in the Army, you can go from state to state or out of the country. Getting to know people of different cultures was really beautiful. It taught me to respect one another and how to be kind to people.”

—Dana Saunders, Army,
VAPHS employee

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2023



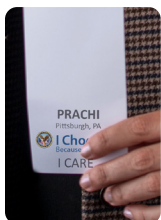
VA

U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health
Administration
VA Pittsburgh
Healthcare System



From left: Prachi Asher, Ali Sonel, Donald Koenig and Brenda Shaffer.

Veterans choose VA for the highest quality care and benefits available anywhere, and for our longstanding commitment to caring for them and their families. **But why do employees choose VA?**
We asked our Executive Leadership Team to tell us why they choose to work at VA.



"I choose VA because of the outstanding Veteran-focused health care."
Prachi Asher, FACHE | Deputy Director

"Unlike other health systems, VA allows me to put Veterans and their well-being first."

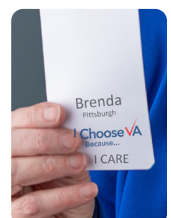
Ali F. Sonel, MD | Chief of Staff



"I choose VA because I, my father and father-in-law are Veterans. Service is in my blood."
Donald Koenig | Director

"I choose VA because we have the honor to care for America's heroes every day."

Brenda Shaffer DNP, RN-BC, NE-BC | Associate Director for Patient Care Services



VITAL STATISTICS

Totals for FY23 (Oct. 1, 2022-Sept. 30, 2023)



VETERANS SERVED

91,202 Unique Patients

- » 80,629 Men
- » 10,572 Women

10,833 Admissions

763,930 Outpatient Visits

6,043 Surgeries

- » 53 Kidney transplants
(11 living donors)
- » 22 Liver transplants

Veterans by period served:

- » 680 WWII
- » 34 Pre-Korean War
- » 3,208 Korean War
- » 1,832 Post-Korean War
- » 38,061 Vietnam War
- » 12,232 Post-Vietnam
- » 31,145 Persian Gulf War
- » 8,415 Post-9/11



VOLUNTEERS

297 Volunteers

28,956 Volunteer Hours

\$713,667 in Donations

Money, goods and services



SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

155 Veterans enrolled in Veterans Treatment Courts

1,191+ Veterans engaged by Health Care for Homeless Veterans Team

402 Caregivers Enrolled

- » 200 in Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers
- » 202 in Program of General Caregiver Support Services



BUDGET

\$1,003,662,000

- » \$886.9 Million Allocation
- » \$116.7 Million Community Care (paid to non-VA providers for Veterans' care)



EMPLOYEES

4,566 Employees

- » 1,179 Nurses
- » 327 Physicians

1,060 Veterans

1,337 trainees in academic year 2022-23



TELEHEALTH

52,833 Mental Health

2,388 Primary Care

65,833 Specialty and Other Care



RESEARCH

\$18,815,228 Funding

233 Investigators

344 Projects



In fiscal year 2023, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System served Veterans from all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam. From as few as four from Nebraska and Wyoming to as many as 5,224 from Ohio, Veterans from all over America trusted VAPHS for their health care.

VA'S HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES



Local, state and federal elected officials joined us for the ribbon-cutting on our new Monroeville VA Outpatient Clinic in September.

New Outpatient Clinic in Monroeville *Brings Care Closer to Home for Many Veterans*

We opened a new outpatient clinic in Monroeville in July and invited Veterans, elected officials and the public to a ribbon-cutting in September. The clinic is part of a partnership between the General Services Administration and VA to deliver six Community Based Outpatient Clinics across the nation.

- » Improves access to primary and specialty outpatient services and reduces many Veterans' drive times.
- » \$92 million to build and lease for 20 years.
- » Estimated 400+ Veterans treated daily.
- » Enables expansion of University Drive Emergency Department to decrease wait times and add psychiatric safe rooms.

Federal legislation is pending to rename the clinic for the late Henry Parham, a World War II Veteran from Wilkinsburg who served with the Army's 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion. The 320th was the only Black unit, and the only balloon battalion, to land on Omaha Beach on D-Day.

Parham and his wife, Ethel, were longtime VAPHS volunteers. Henry Parham died in 2021 at the age of 99. He was the last surviving Black combat Veteran who took part in the D-Day landings.



Ethel Parham, widow of the late Henry Parham, attended the ribbon-cutting. Federal legislation is pending to name the clinic for Henry Parham, a Wilkinsburg man who served with the Army's 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion.



Available Services at Monroeville VA Clinic —

- **Primary/Mental Health Care**
- **Hematology/Oncology**
- **Imaging**
- **Eye Clinic**
- **Radiology**
- **Physical Medicine/Rehab**
- **Pathology/Lab Services**
- **Eligibility and Enrollment**
- **Telehealth**
- **Rotating Specialty Care:** Acupuncture, Chiropractic, Dietary, Echocardiogram, Endocrinology, Gastroenterology, Palliative Care, Pain Management, Podiatry, Pulmonology, Renal, Rheumatology, Social Work



VA Secretary Denis McDonough, second from left, and U.S. Rep. Summer Lee, right, congratulated our team that steered the successful activation of our new clinic in Monroeville.



Reaccreditations

We received the following reaccreditations effective through 2026 following on-site, three-day visits from surveyors:

- » Hospital, Home Care, and Behavioral Health Care and Human Services, The Joint Commission.
- » Behavioral Health, Employment and Community Services and the Veterans Recovery Center, Commission for Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).



VHA Uber Health Connect

We implemented VHA Uber Health Connect in May for Veterans eligible for transportation benefits to and from medical appointments. Ridership grew from 174 in the first month to approximately 7,000 in the first six months.



VA Secretary Denis McDonough in August recognized the cardiac surgery team for its successful efforts implementing TAVR surgery here.



Minimally Invasive Cardiac Surgery

We began performing transcatheter aortic valve replacements (TAVRs) in July in a newly renovated hybrid operating room.

- » Uses smaller incisions than open-heart surgery for faster recovery.
- » Requires shorter hospital stays.
- » Completed 15 in six months – six months sooner than projected.



VAPH's ADHC-MVP staff join Veterans for an ice breaker activity that encourages social interaction while improving physical coordination.



Adult Day Health Care Mobile Program

We introduced our new Adult Day Health Care Mobile Veteran Program (ADHC-MVP) at one American Legion and two VFW posts. ADHC-MVP provides eligible Veterans with the opportunity to socialize and participate in various physical activities at Veterans service organizations near their homes. Our staff rotate among the sites, where they work with each Veteran and their caregiver to develop individualized care plans. Prior to the pandemic, we provided adult day health care at our H.J. Heinz III campus.



Western Market Initiatives

The Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 4 Western Market joins resources in Pittsburgh, Butler, Erie and Altoona to enhance and integrate care for Veterans within their communities.

The four VA campuses in this market function as an integrated health network covering western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and northern West Virginia through face-to-face, clinical video telehealth and phone consultations.

Initiatives we expanded through the Western Market in FY23 included:

- Virtual oncology/chemo clinics — VAPHS hematology/oncology providers treat Veterans via virtual appointments at the Erie and Altoona VA medical centers and collaborate with advanced practice practitioners who provide face-to-face appointments.
- Cardiology Hub — We now provide virtual cardiology appointments to all four Western Market VA medical centers and the Washington County outpatient clinic. VAPHS-based providers also provide on-site, face-to-face care in Erie and surrounding outpatient clinics.
- Rheumatology Hub — We now provide virtual rheumatology appointments to all four Western Market VA medical centers and are expanding to community-based outpatient clinics.
- Endocrine Hub – Staffed by an Erie-based, dedicated physician and pharmacists who serve the entire Western Market, along with on-site, Pittsburgh-based advanced practice practitioners in Erie.
- Ophthalmology — A VAPHS surgeon travels to Erie to perform cataract surgeries, increasing cataract surgeries there by an average of 120 cases each year. VISN 4 hired ophthalmologists for the Erie VA, eliminating the need for a contracted surgeon.



Caregiver Robert Grier Jr., left, and his father, Air Force Veteran Robert Grier Sr., attended our Hidden Heroes event.



I have been going to this VA for 49 years and feel it has been the best care in the world.”

Veteran’s comment in a VSignals Survey



Hidden Heroes Honors Caregivers

We hosted elected officials in October to announce Pennsylvania as a Hidden Heroes Commonwealth. Hidden Heroes through the Elizabeth Dole Foundation works to ensure caregivers of Veterans – the hidden heroes among us — and service members have access to resources such as our Caregiver Support Program (CSP).



VA Health Care Priority **HIRE FASTER AND MORE COMPETITIVELY**

To ensure adequate staff are available to provide Veterans with the soonest and best health care, VAPHS:

- » Met the national target of a 3% increase in employees onboarded in FY23.
- » Grew its workforce by 2.5% in FY23, exceeding VA's growth rate goal of 1.6%.
- » Added 600 employees over the past five years for a total of 4,600.
- » Boasts a turnover rate of less than 8%.
- » Held two hiring fairs and an onboarding surge event in FY23, along with a third hiring fair in December 2023 (FY24).
- » Implemented:
 - Recruitment/relocation/retention incentives.
 - Extensive use of VA student loan repayment programs to retain vital staff.
 - Wide use of VA nursing scholarship programs to support career growth for staff.
 - A recruitment referral bonus program for current employees.
- » Has a dedicated nurse recruitment team and in FY23 hired a physician/provider recruiter.
- » Continues to hire strategically to support its access-to-care goals and reduce the time it takes to fill vacancies.

VA Health Care Priority SERVE VETERANS WITH MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURE

- » **Every Veteran** who attended a primary care appointment was offered a toxic-exposures screening.
- » Approximately **200 Veterans** attended **five regional PACT Act enrollment/benefits fairs** hosted by VAPHS and the Pittsburgh and Cleveland regional VBA offices.
- » **Sixty-eight Veterans** attended our **PACT Act Veterans Town Hall and Enrollment and Military Toxic Exposures Fair** with VBA's Pittsburgh Regional Office on our Heinz campus. Three enrolled in VA health care, seven filed PACT Act claims and 18 had toxic-exposure screenings.
- » Our medicine and research teams are developing a **Center of Excellence** for post-deployment lung injury that will provide laboratory studies, advanced imaging and pulmonary function exercise testing.



(LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq) Smoke billows in from all sides as Sgt. Richard Ganske, 84th Combat Engineer Battalion, pushes the bulldozer deep into the flames of the burn pit to keep burnable items constantly ablaze. (photo courtesy of 28th Public Affairs Detachment, Sept. 24, 2004)

VA Health Care Priority ACCELERATE VA'S JOURNEY TO A HIGH RELIABILITY ORGANIZATION

We continued our journey to become a **High Reliability Organization (HRO)**. HROs adopt practices to **help individuals and teams continuously learn, inquire and improve**. They have fewer than anticipated accidents or events of harm despite operating in highly complex, high-risk environments. Staff lead efforts to improve daily work and make a difference for the Veterans we serve.

- » We increased the number of employees who completed HRO baseline training, empowering them to lead efforts, report concerns, and more.
- » We added new HRO-focused leaders to our Executive Leadership Team (ELT) who instill a culture in which high reliability, safety and process improvement are second nature to all staff, improving the care we provide to Veterans:
 - Robert R. Kling, Associate Director
 - Jeston Robinson, MBA, Assistant Director
 - Allison Schanck, MSN, Deputy Associate Director of Patient Care Services
- » We held patient safety forums on topics such as physical safety and how to report patient safety concerns.

VIETNAM GULF WAR POST - 9/11

**WERE YOU EXPOSED TO BURN PITS,
NUCLEAR WEAPONS, CHEMICALS,
AGENT ORANGE, OR OTHER TOXINS
WHILE SERVING IN THE MILITARY?**

**Apply for VA
health care today
at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT).**

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System



Veterans and staff experienced stress reduction and improved mood at our therapeutic drum circles.

VA Health Care Priority **SUPPORT VETERANS' WHOLE HEALTH, THEIR CAREGIVERS, AND SURVIVORS**

VA's Whole Health Program empowers and equips Veterans to take charge of their health and live life to the fullest by focusing on their personal values, aspirations and health and well-being goals.

- » Improved screening of Women Veterans ensured those who were homeless or experiencing food insecurity were promptly connected with VA resources for housing and nutrition.
- » Veteran participants in VA Whole Health at VAPHS increased from 5,424 in FY22 to 7,566 in FY23, ensuring access to tools and resources to take charge of their health.
- » Veterans will soon benefit from expanded VA Whole Health services following the start of construction of a Whole Health Suite in

FY23 at our H.J. Heinz III campus.

- » Veterans and their spouses or partners can now learn communication skills for renewing and reconnecting during our quarterly, one-day Warrior to Soul Mate workshops.
- » Veterans continue to be full participants in their care through our Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs), which empower them to take charge of their personal health care goals. Each individualized PACT includes the Veteran, their family and caregivers, a primary care provider, clinical pharmacist, registered nurse care manager, and licensed practical nurse (LPN) or medical assistant and clerk. Social workers or other specialists join each PACT as needed.

VA Health Care Priority

PREVENT VETERAN SUICIDE

Our **Suicide Prevention Team (SPT)** forms community task forces, conducts outreach and education, closely follows Veterans who have been identified as at risk, and provides postvention services when needed. In FY23:

- » **We increased use of our Suicide Prevention Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) program**, which uses video conferencing technology to conveniently, securely, and quickly provide Veterans with access to health care services from remote facilities.
- » **Our chaplains held their inaugural suicide prevention training** for community faith leaders. Participants learned to recognize signs of suicide and actions to take to save lives.
- » **Our Caregiver Support Program implemented quarterly VA S.A.V.E. Suicide Prevention Training** for caregivers of Veterans.
- » **Our two community engagement and partnership coordinators worked with over 16 community coalitions** on public health approaches and other community-based models for Veteran suicide prevention.
- » **Our SPT worked with gun shops and sportsmens clubs to promote safe weapons storage** and distribute lethal-means safety materials and gun locks. In

FY23, we handed out 6,206 gun locks – up from 2,263 in FY22.

The National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report released the following for 2021 (most recent data available):

- » 6,392 Veterans died by suicide in 2021 – 114 more than in 2020. The number of non-Veteran suicides also increased by 2,000 from 2020 to 2021.
- » The average number of Veteran suicides per day rose from 16.4 in 2001 to 17.5 in 2021. Approximately 61.9% (10.8 per day) of those Veterans had not used VHA recently or ever.



www.veteranscrisisline.net
www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention



Community faith leaders learn to recognize signs of suicide and actions to save lives during our chaplains' suicide prevention training.



“The VA mental health system was and is tremendously helpful in my journey. I thank all those who were encouraging and understanding.”

Veteran's comment in a VSignals Survey



RESEARCH MODERNIZATION INNOVATION

19,000 Veterans Join MVP Through VAPHS *Part of 1 Million Enrolled Nationwide*

VA in November officially reached 1 million Veteran enrollees in its Million Veteran Program (MVP). The historic number includes 19,000 Veterans who joined through VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS).

MVP launched in 2011 as a genetic research program and is now the largest such program of its kind in the world. VAPHS has participated in MVP from the start, **enrolling its 19,000th Veteran** in December 2023.

Bea Chakraborty, VAPHS's MVP research coordinator, said the 19,000 enrollees include Veterans from southwestern Pennsylvania, Erie, Butler, Altoona, and Belmont County in Ohio.

"We've even had some Veterans from as far as Clarksburg, West Virginia, and Cumberland, Maryland," she said.

VAPHS is one of 19 sites to have enrolled "such a phenomenal number of participants," said Anicka Samuel, MVP's national program coordinator, in an email announcing the milestone. Over 70 VA sites participate in MVP.

Thanks to MVP, Veterans have directly contributed to over 350 peer-reviewed publications.

Any Veteran – enrolled in VA health care or not – can join MVP. To learn how, stop by our MVP offices at University Drive in Bldg. 1, Room 1N105B, or at the H.J. Heinz III campus in Bldg. 71, 2nd floor, Pod 1; call **866-441-6075**; or visit **mvp.va.gov**.



VHA Innovation Ecosystem SNAPSHOT



Two VA Shark Tank Finalists

In August, VHA's Diffusion of Excellence named two VAPHS innovations as Shark Tank finalists:

Veterans with diabetes have improved control over symptoms with Dr. Archana Bandi's ELEGANT-DM2: Early Intervention Addressing Therapeutic Inertia in Diabetes Mellitus innovation, which ensures seamless communications between their specialists, primary care provider and pharmacists.

Veterans who see us for virtual appointments experience fewer delays in care with our Virtual Waiting Room. A VAPHS scheduler now joins virtually immediately after Veterans complete the clinical portion of their appointment to set their next appointment on the spot – eliminating the need to call the Veteran later to set their next appointment.

Of the seven sharks that bid to adopt our waiting room innovation, we chose VA North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System's bid.



Contraception on Demand Expands Nationally

Women Veterans at VAPHS and at a growing number of VA medical centers nationwide can now request a 12-month supply of birth control through Contraception on Demand, our 2022 Shark Tank winner. The patient-centered innovation, developed here at VAPHS by Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion health scientist Deirdre Quinn, Ph.D., and her team, has been successfully implemented at seven VA medical centers, with another three in progress.

Learn more about our innovations:

- marketplace.va.gov/innovations/elegant-dm2
- marketplace.va.gov/innovations/virtual-waiting-room
- marketplace.va.gov/innovations/contraception-on-demand



VAPHS Researchers Recognized

Our research program focuses on health issues unique to Veterans, applying scientific knowledge to develop solutions to improve Veterans' health and well-being. Dr. Carolyn Clancy, VHA's Assistant Under Secretary for Discovery, Education & Affiliate Networks, visited VAPHS in May.



PHASER Medication Testing

Veterans now have access to individualized medication therapy through our new Pharmacogenomic Testing for Veterans (PHASER). Introduced in FY23, the clinical education program targets 40 medications. Results help guide therapy to improve medication efficacy and reduce side effects. PHASER has also been expanded to all VISN 4 facilities.



Modernization at VAPHS

In FY23 we:

- » Modernized our University Drive radiation therapy suite.
- » Completed renovations to unit 2A in our Community Living Center to provide a private bed/bath for all patients; unit 2B will be renovated in FY24.
- » Renovated outpatient surgical clinics at University Drive.
- » Installed a private, freestanding lactation pod at University Drive for Veterans and visitors who breastfeed or pump.

Delivering *Excellence* to Veterans



Awards



President Biden presented HERL's Rory Cooper, second from left, with the National Medal of Technology and Innovation in October 2023.

Rory Cooper, Ph.D.

Human Engineering and Research Laboratories (HERL) founder and director – 2023 National Medal of Technology and Innovation recipient – our nation's highest honor for technological innovation – and 2023 inductee into the National Inventors Hall of Fame for his innovations improving mobility technology for wheelchair users.

A biomedical engineer, Cooper founded HERL in 1994 at VAPHS to solve common problems faced by disabled Veterans and other wheelchair users. He holds over 20 U.S. patents for assistive technology and continuously works to develop innovations to improve manual and electric wheelchair technology. An Army Veteran, Cooper was stationed in Germany when a bicycle accident in 1980 left him disabled from the waist down.

Dr. Daniel Hall

VAPHS surgeon – 2023 John M. Eisenberg Patient Safety and Quality Award recipient in the category of National Level Innovation.

Hall led the VAPHS team that developed The Surgical Pause, a 30-second, potentially lifesaving, pre-surgery frailty screening. The screening identifies high-risk Veterans who need further evaluation before elective surgery. Shown to decrease six-month mortality among frail Veterans from 25% to 8%, it is now used at more than 50 VA

medical centers and a growing number of civilian institutions.

Lynn Baniak, Ph.D., RN

Associate chief nurse for research – 2023 Betty Irene Moore fellow at the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis. The fellowship recognizes early- to mid-career nursing scholars and innovators and requires they take part in an innovative research project or study. Fellows receive \$450,000 in funding over three years for their project plus \$50,000 for their home institution.

Dr. Vida Passero

Chief medical officer of VHA National TeleOncology and VAPHS medical oncologist and hematologist – 2023 American Telemedicine Association Telehealth Champion Award recipient.

Passero is building a national hematology- and cancer-care service delivery model to ensure all patients have access to specialized hematology/oncology care. She also leads the VAPHS team that launched the Virtual Cancer Care Clinic. The clinic uses clinical video telehealth and remote infusion treatment clinics to allow patients in rural Pennsylvania to receive chemotherapy close their homes while maintaining continuity of care and management with their Pittsburgh-based primary oncologist.



What Veterans Say

- » In FY23, 94% of VAPHS patients surveyed said they trust us to fulfill our nation's commitment to Veterans.
- » VAPHS's trust score is consistently higher than the national average, which was 90.7% for FY23.
- » VAPHS received four out of five stars for patient experience on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems' patient-survey rating.



From left: Robert Kling, Jeston Robinson, Brooke Decker and Allison Schanck.

Why does our Executive Leadership Team choose to work at VA?

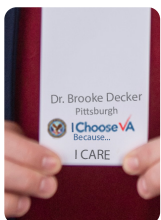
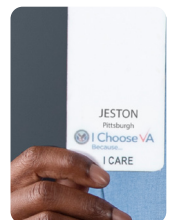


"After my time in the Marine Corps, I missed the sense of duty and purpose that can only be found by putting others first. I have found that here at VA. It takes all of us, working together with a shared vision, sharing that sense of purpose, to fulfill our mission – and we get to do it every day, alongside the best people you can find. That is why I choose VA."

Robert R. Kling | Associate Director

"Because I am a Veteran and I can continue to serve Veterans."

Jeston Robinson, MBA | Assistant Director



"I choose to work at VA because it is the best care anywhere."

Brooke Decker, MD | Deputy Chief of Staff

"I choose VA because it is deeply rewarding. Committing to VA's noble mission allows me to use my skills and expertise to make a positive difference in the lives of those who have served our nation."

Allison Schanck, MSN |

Deputy Associate Director of Patient Care Services





I receive care at the VA because **the service is better**, and I can get in to see a provider **much quicker than going outside of the VA**. I choose to work at the VA because of the **great benefits**. I am committed **to providing excellent customer service** and I have **the skills and experience to make a positive impact on the lives of Veterans.**"

**Dana M. Saunders on why she chooses VA
for her health care and her career**

Dana supervises medical support assistants in our imaging department.

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VA



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Monroeville VA Clinic

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

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