

# Minneapolis

VA Health Care System



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VA U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2023

# MESSAGE

## From the Director



Thanks for taking the time to review our Minneapolis VA Health Care System 2023 Annual Report.

2023 was a year of both recovery and growth. We are still addressing the effects of the COVID pandemic while simultaneously growing, expanding, or initiating many new programs. All our efforts are aimed at improving the lives of the Veterans we serve. This includes high quality, accessible traditional health care along with some first-rate research, education, and community support. Many of these initiatives are highlighted in this report.

Last year I talked about labor market challenges in health care and I'm happy to report that this has improved. We've been able to recruit and retain exceptional employees in almost all specialties and have fared well in a competitive healthcare marketplace. We haven't solved all staffing issues but it's good to note that we've had a record hiring year to address Veterans needs. You can see our staffing and workload vital statistics on page 22 of the report.

I want to highlight some of the new or expanded programs from this year:

- We opened new Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) in Mankato, St. James and Maplewood. In addition to an improved care environment, we offered new specialty services at these sites.
- We opened a new Specialty Care Clinic on our main campus. This centralized several specialty medicine services in one location and opened space in the Medical Center to construct more single-bed inpatient rooms.

- The PACT Act expanded care and benefits to Veterans with toxic exposures. We saw many new Veterans through this program and facilitated their increased benefits with our VBA partners.
- The COMPACT Act was implemented to expand services to Veterans in acute suicidal crisis and remove barriers to seeking care regardless of their enrollment.
- We moved many specialty care services to our CBOCs with the goal of taking care closer to Veterans where they live. This has included physical therapy, infusion services, audiology, eye services and others, depending on the CBOC location.
- We added a Mobile Medical Unit intended to take care to Veterans at risk for homelessness at locations easily accessible for them.

In the upcoming year we are significantly expanding our Community Resource and Referral Center in downtown Minneapolis. This will bring more services to Veterans at risk for homelessness at a location that is accessible and welcoming for their needs.

We will also break ground on our Women's Health Clinic. This will provide a dedicated building to deliver most women Veteran services and will be separate from, but connected to, the main Medical Center.

We are very proud of our research and education efforts, and you'll see pages in the report highlighting this work.

The Minneapolis VA has a well-deserved reputation for excellence in quality and service. We're proud of our programs and the many accomplishments of our staff. We have over 100,000 Minnesota and Western Wisconsin Veterans who entrust us with their care, and we will continue to do our very best to meet their needs in a variety of ways and settings. Veterans have earned this, and we intend to deliver on the promise.

Patrick Kelly, Director, US Navy (ret)



**Kurt Thielen**  
Associate Director  
US Air Force (ret)



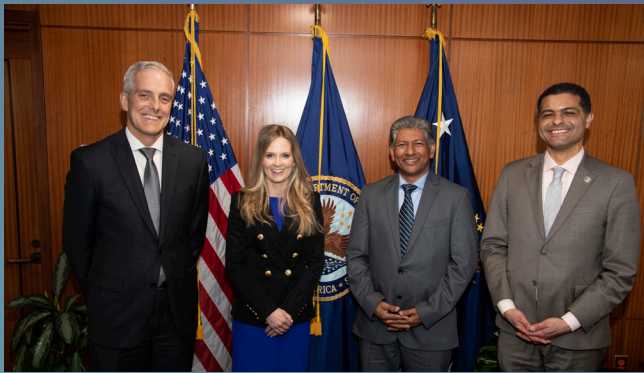
**Michael Armstrong, MD**  
Chief of Staff



**Teresa Tungseth**  
Nurse Executive



**Amy Archer**  
Chief Experience  
Officer



# AWARDS & Recognitions

Dr. Patricia Dickmann and Gobind Tarchand, PA were honored with the **American Legion’s “2022 Physician of the Year” and “2022 Health Care Provider of the Year” awards** (awarded in 2023).

Dr. Shelby Setnikar was the recipient of the **2023 Women Veteran Trailblazers Initiative** “Women Making the Difference” through the Center of Women Veterans.

Rhonda Groebner, RN was the recipient of the **2023 VA Women’s Health Research Impact Award**.

Dr. Alisa Duran received the **American Medical Association Inspiration Award** for support of women in medicine.

Dr. Erica Seidel was the recipient of the **2023 VHA David M. Worthen Rising Star Award for Excellence in Health Professions Education**.

Two on our team were recognized by the Federal Executive Board of Minnesota as **Civil Servants of the Year** Shawn Waldron, MSN, RN was recognized for Innovation and Dr. Chris Luhman received the Unsung Hero award. The annual Civil Servant of the Year Awards Ceremony recognizes the outstanding men and women who work in Federal and Military service.

Dr. Jeremy Taylor received the **2023 Annual Medical Staff Award for Clinical Excellence**.

Ashley Cassel and Amanda Heller were named **2023 Supervisor of the Year** at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.

Christopher Roberts was awarded the **2022 National VA Police Supervisor of the Year** (awarded in 2023).

Teresa Tungseth, MN, RN, NEA-BC Minneapolis VA Nurse Executive was the recipient of the VISN 23 Network Director’s **Commendation Award**.

In recognition for its achievement and innovation in health care sustainability, Minneapolis VA Health Care System received the **Top 25 Hospitals Award**, the **Greening the OR Recognition Award**, and the **Circle of Excellence award** in the following categories: waste, chemicals, sustainable procurement, energy, water, transportation, and climate from Practice Greenhealth, the nation’s leading organization dedicated to environmental sustainability in health care.

Kimberly Langer received the **2022 National VA Police Administrative Officer of the Year** (awarded in 2023).

Minneapolis VA Tele Oncology team received the **2022 HeRO Award**. The National HeRO Award is the highest level of High Reliability Organization (HRO) recognition available within VHA and honors staff members who advance VHA’s Journey to High Reliability (awarded in 2023).



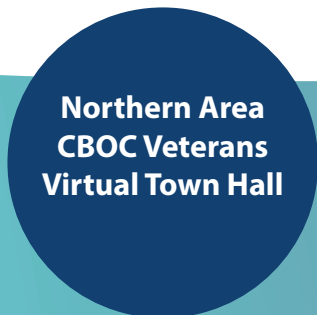
# REFLECTING

on 2023

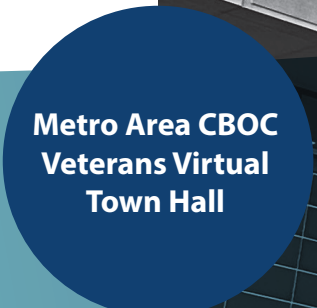
**DAV Donation**



**Northern Area CBOC Veterans Virtual Town Hall**



**Metro Area CBOC Veterans Virtual Town Hall**



**Outreach event at Twin Cities Pride Festival**



**Under Secretary for Health, Department of VA  
Dr. Shereef Elnahal visits Minneapolis VAHCS**



**CBOC expansion in St. James, Mankato, Maplewood  
(Pictured - US Rep. Brad Finstad at Mankato ribbon cutting)**



**Mental Health Social Work Community hosted a 2K walk around campus**



**Juneteenth**

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough & Senator Amy Klobuchar visited Minneapolis VA Health Care System**



**Wisconsin Area CBOC Veterans Virtual Town Hall**

**MN Vikings visit patients in the Spinal Cord Injury and Disorder Center**



**Hiring event to bring on additional Medical Support Assistants MVAHCS-wide**



**Specialty Care Clinic Opens**



**CRRC dedicated a Mobile Medical Unit (MMU), a vehicle to reach more Veterans**



*St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter joins Veterans and VA staff in unveiling the Minneapolis VA's new Mobile Medical Unit.*



# COMMUNITY RESOURCE

## and Referral Center (CRRC)

The Minneapolis VA Homeless Program is located downtown Minneapolis at the VA Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC), and provides multiple services to homeless Veterans. The spectrum of care provided includes primary care, mental health services, employment, legal assistance, housing supportive services, and basic services (laundry, showers, and a computer lab). During FY23, the homeless program served 1,920 Veterans with 13,456 visits.

CRRC was awarded a Mobile Medical Unit (MMU), a vehicle to reach vulnerable Veterans in the community, specifically those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The MMU allows providers to identify and provide care to Veterans who would otherwise not access medical care, mental health services, or housing.

The Grant and Per Diem program has four separate community grantees within our catchment area, providing a total of 97 transitional beds and services. CRRC also has 12 beds for Contract Emergency Residential Services (CERS). Our HUD VASH program has 1,035 Section 8 vouchers throughout our catchment area and was awarded an additional 75 vouchers FY23.

The Veteran Justice Program consists of Veteran Justice Outreach and Health Care for Re-Entry Veterans. We have four Veteran justice outreach specialists who work closely with 11 Veteran courts in our service area. They also work with Veterans and their treatment teams on recovery and treatment planning. Our team provides outreach to 19 state and federal prisons to provide pre-release planning and post-release case management. We are strong participants in the Minnesota Statewide Homeless Veteran Registry, which is a by-name list of every homeless Veteran in Minnesota. The registry helps to ensure that Veterans experiencing homelessness have access to appropriate housing and services.

# COMMUNITY BASED

## Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs)



The Minneapolis VA Health Care System Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) include 13 locations across eastern Minnesota and western Wisconsin. Lyle C. Pearson (Mankato) and St. James CBOCs were converted from contracted staff to VA employees in January 2023. The Lyle C. Pearson CBOC expanded to over 13,000 square feet with 27 employees. It provides primary care, mental health, radiology, laboratory, social work, dietitian, physical therapy, telemedicine, and pharmacy services. The St. James CBOC expanded to over 7,800 square feet with seven employees and provides primary care, radiology, laboratory and telemedicine services.



The Maplewood CBOC moved into a new location in January 2023. The clinic expanded to roughly 30,000 square feet with 65 employees. The clinic provides primary care, mental health services, physical therapy, audiology, laboratory, telemedicine, social work, a dietitian, a pharmacist and, with the clinic growth, added ultrasound, optometry and an optic shop to the list of services.

Other highlights from across the CBOCS in FY23 include the administration of COVID-19 vaccines and the much appreciated drive-up or walk-in flu clinics in September



and October. The CBOCs continue to collaborate with specialty care to provide services at many locations.

In FY23 we added cardiology, gastroenterology, oncology and the Prevention of Amputation in Veterans Everywhere (PAVE) program, peritoneal dialysis, rheumatology and nephrology services to a number of our locations. The CBOCs also held four virtual town halls this past year with Director Kelly and Veterans Benefits Administration representation.



*Exterior view of the newly opened Specialty Care Clinic at the Minneapolis VA.*

# FACILITIES ENGINEERING

## and Upgrades

Patients and visitors to the Minneapolis VA Outpatient Entrance enjoyed a new and improved entry all year. The project, which broke ground in May 2022, was completed in November 2022. The project solved accessibility issues by adding sliding doors designed at an angle to the entrance to allow for easy navigation from the breezeway to the parking ramp. The project also added a vestibule in between the doors to create a buffer for the weather to keep salt, sand and dirt in the transition space instead of the Medical Center.

The Specialty Care Clinic opened with a ceremonial ribbon cutting in August. The building, just over 15,000 square feet in size, has 28 exam rooms, two procedure rooms, a blood lab and an EKG/cardiac room.

Relocating specialty services into the new space allows for centralized services for our Veterans that are easily accessible.

The renovation of Building 223, located at the Upper Post of Fort Snelling, opened in the summer for pandemic storage. This renovation project incorporated trusses from a hangar in the old Wold-Chamberlain Field.

Finally, we completed the last of our CBOC lease renewals and are working on lease renewals for our Community Resource and Referral Center and supporting renewals for the St. Paul and Duluth Vet Centers.

Upgrades on campus will continue into 2024 with the expected opening of a new surgical waiting room and the electronic health record modernization room in February.

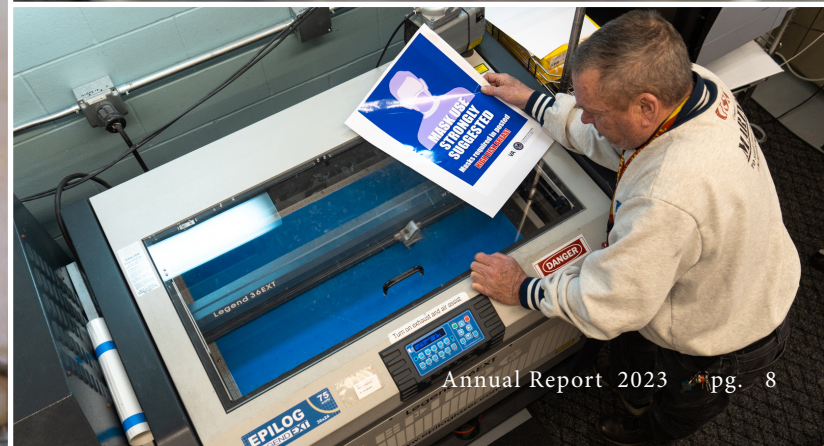
We will also complete our second private medical surgical ward on wing 2K and begin construction on our third ward on 3D.

The long-awaited Women's Clinic is expected to break ground in April, and phase two of our three-phase Mental Health renovation will be completed in the coming summer with the final phase completed in early 2025.

Other infrastructure improvements will continue to focus on the private room initiative in 3K, modernizing our operating rooms, Legionella prevention and maintaining aging infrastructure.

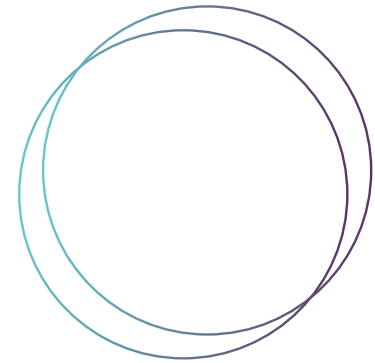


Director Patrick Kelly surveys recent construction at the hospital.



# HIGH RELIABILITY

## Organization (HRO)



VHA's transformation to a High Reliability Organization focuses on the inclusive practices, behaviors and habits of all leaders and staff members.

The goal of becoming a High Reliability Organization is zero harm for our patients and employees. The Minneapolis VA Health Care System initiated its high reliability efforts in FY22. Four foundational practices, specific activities that leaders implement to facilitate the progression to zero harm, include safety huddles, a visual management system, leader rounding and safety forums.

Within the safety huddle practice, we have established a 3-tier system that encompasses all frontline, management, senior leadership and executive leadership voices. In FY24 we will be focusing on improvements to our safety huddle system as HRO ambassadors will coach and guide our groups to meet expectations and the intent of the safety huddle.

A visual management system is a display that contains snapshots of clinical and operational performance and improvements aligning with HRO goals. Our system is directly linked to our tiered huddles, allows for transparent tracking of improvement work and creates a closed loop for communication from the bottom up and the top down.

In FY23 we launched executive team HRO leader rounding, which consists of rounding four to five work areas per month. These are regularly scheduled, structured visits with interdisciplinary teams to discuss high reliability, safety and improvement efforts. The aim is to learn about the everyday challenges contributing to patient harm. Frontline employees are given the opportunity to provide feedback post-rounding to help inform our improvement efforts over time.

Monthly safety forums run by the Quality, Safety, and Value Department, often feature frontline staff who share their stories as they align with HRO themes of the month. They are intended to reinforce the importance of organizational safety, 'just culture' and psychological safety. These safety forums reinforce the importance of safety reporting and our goal for zero harm.

Training is an essential component to our advancement on the journey to high reliability. We began educating all employees through a requirement to complete HRO baseline training within 90 days of being hired.

In FY23 we took the training expectation a step further by launching our High Reliability Leadership Academy. The academy focuses on providing leadership development and enhancing HRO leadership commitment across our system reinforcing just culture. Just culture upholds a system of shared accountability where the organization and its leaders are held accountable for systems it has designed, and for responding to the behaviors of employees in a fair and just way. The employee is

accountable for the quality of their choices and reporting errors and system vulnerabilities.

This year we held two additional just culture-focused interactive presentations, one for frontline staff and one for supervisors.



*Dr. Brown and Dr. Sheetal are all smiles after a successful training exercise at the Minneapolis VA.*

# VETERAN Experience

## Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CCICM)



*A Veteran in the Spinal Cord Injury unit demonstrates a newly donated exoskeleton, which allows him to walk with assistance.*

The mission of Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CCICM) is to continuously improve equitable health care delivery through seamless integration of quality care coordination at all levels. It also focuses on optimizing health care resources to enhance the Veteran experience along the continuum of care. It is a practice framework that addresses fragmentation, variation, and gaps in care by standardizing a system-wide, integrated case management approach. It began as a Veteran Health Administration (VHA) pilot project in 2016 with a dozen VHA sites and has grown into a coordinated national rollout.

CCICM focuses on three components that aim to improve communication and care engagement, deepen trust in the VA system of care and enhance satisfaction with VHA care. First, predictive analytics and risk stratification tools are utilized to proactively identify Veterans managing moderate or complex health care needs. Second, the Care Coordination Review Team (CCRT), an interdisciplinary

team of health care professionals, works to assign lead coordinators to this group of Veterans. Finally, CCICM deploys training and provides mentorship and support for lead coordinators.

The Minneapolis VA CCICM initiative began in March 2020. In 2023, our Minneapolis team focused on reducing high resource utilization of the Emergency Department (both at the VA and in the community) and reducing rates of readmission to the hospital by expanding the overall number of Veterans served by a lead coordinator. We also focused on enhancing care coordination, case management education and improving Veteran and staff satisfaction.

Enrollment increased by 41 percent from 2022 to 2023. Cumulatively, CCICM has served 160 Veterans through targeted, short-term case management. As of December 2023, there are 64 Veterans assigned a lead coordinator. The Minneapolis team developed a local training and mentoring program for lead coordinators. In addition,

the Minneapolis team partnered with the Midwest Consortium to create a formal six-hour Lead Coordinator Training Program. In total, 35 new lead coordinators have been provided targeted training in clinical case management practices. A highlight of this experience was the collaborative relationship established with the Minneapolis Whole Health Program.

Finally, the Minneapolis CCICM team gathered feedback about Veteran and staff satisfaction through surveys and an in-person listening session. Of note, 88 percent of Veterans surveyed felt working with their lead coordinator helped them better understand and trust their health care team.

In 2024 the Minneapolis CCICM team plans to continue to identify and serve those experiencing increased use of emergency services and admissions as well as navigating increased stress in their lives and their health care journey.



*Dr. Joanne Donnelly instructs proper simulation procedures at the Minneapolis VA.*

# WOMEN'S

## Health

The Women's Health Program at the Minneapolis VA celebrated 30 years in September. In 1993, we were one of the first four programs in the nation to receive the original program grant. The program ensures high-quality, gender-specific comprehensive primary care, gynecologic specialty care, maternity and infertility care, breast care, and mental health services are provided in a safe and sensitive environment. The Minneapolis VA Health Care System (MVAHCS) served over 7,000 unique women Veterans in FY23, 38 percent of whom are in their reproductive years (ages 18-44). Approximately 88

percent of Women Veterans receive their primary care with a designated women's health Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT).

Areas of focused development in 2023 included: pelvic floor physical therapy, high risk breast care coordination, maternity care expansion and maternal mental health, gynecology practice, reproductive health and women's whole health.

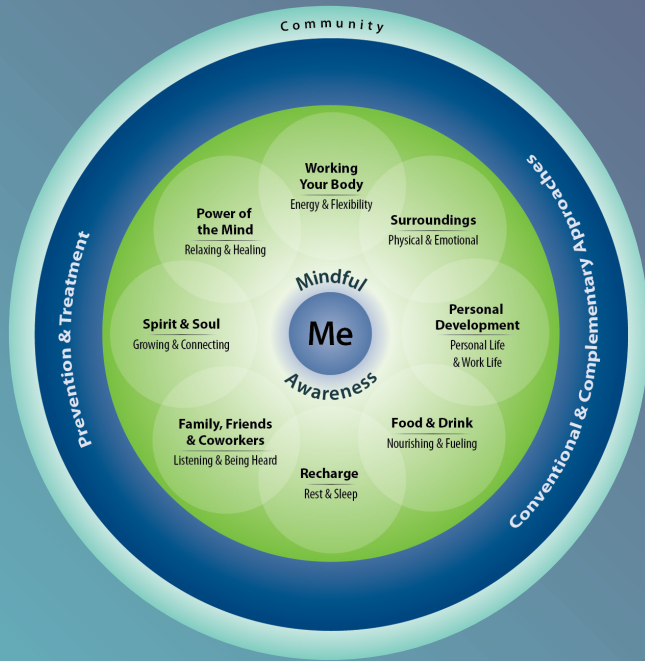
Looking ahead to 2024 our areas of focus include: continued expansion of high-risk breast program and multiple providers receiving formal certification for treatment of symptoms in menopause. We also plan implementation of a full reproductive health program



including necessary access to pregnancy options, counseling, and ongoing implementation of the SERVICE Act to include early mammogram screening for Veterans with toxic exposures.

2023 was filled with national recognition and awards for our women leaders. Dr. Shelby Setnikar was a recipient of the 2023 Women Veteran Trailblazers Initiative "Women Making the Difference" through the Center of Women Veterans. Rhonda Groebner received the VA Women's Health Research Impact Award and Dr. Alisa Duran was honored with American Medical Association Inspiration Award for support of women in medicine. Additionally, Dr. Jill Bowman Peterson was nominated 2023 Top Doctor in Mpls.St.Paul Magazine.

# WHOLE Health



*Physical Therapist Hillari Olson conducts a virtual Parkinson's Exercise Class.*



*Veterans participate in the first Women Veterans Wellness Retreat in May 2023.*

Whole Health focuses on the Veteran, putting them at the center of their care. It encompasses what matters most as an approach to health care. It means shifting the question from –“What is the matter WITH you”– to –“What matters TO you”– so we can better align the care we provide with what is most important to them in their life.

Whole Health isn't a department or program, but rather a systematic approach to care being implemented across the health care system.

In addition to Taking Charge of My Life and Health and Mind-Body Skills groups, we also offer virtual individual Whole Health coaching and work closely with the Center for Integrative Health and Healing to offer additional services including acupuncture, mindfulness, yoga, tai chi, integrative nutrition, iRest Yoga Nidra and art therapy.

All of our offerings work to help Veterans better manage stress, anxiety, depression, chronic pain and sleep disturbances.

We also have community partners to include: Every Third Saturday, Silent Warrior Project, Mile in My Shoes and Dream of Wild Health. Each partnership offers unique opportunities for Veterans to continue their journey to Whole Health through physical, emotional and mental health practices.

The first Minneapolis VA Women Veterans Wellness Retreat was held in May 2023. Of the 24 participants, the youngest was age 29 and the oldest was 75 years old, the median age was about 50. Veterans attended from all over Minnesota and Western Wisconsin, one Veteran traveled more than four hours from Grand Rapids, and

another traveled over two hours from Colfax, Wisconsin.

The agenda included a group icebreaker, yoga and reflective practice session. Breakout sessions included: mindful kitchen, art therapy, meditation, music therapy, nature-based healing and journaling. Post event surveys indicated a majority of participants were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the day-long retreat. Thirty percent enrolled in a follow on Mind-Body Skills group.

FY24 will bring more opportunities for general participants as well as women-only cohorts for Taking Charge of My Life and Health, Mind-Body Skills and a new group will focus on body image. The Whole Health team will also explore new opportunities in rural locations.



Colin Kenow fabricates components for RECOVER.



Biomedical Engineer Dr. Andrew Hansen mentors and demonstrates new research initiatives in prosthetics and research.



# RESEARCH

## *Rehabilitation & Engineering Center for Optimizing Veteran Engagement & Reintegration (RECOVER)*

The Minneapolis VA Health Care System (MVAHCS) Research Program, first established in 1946 and affiliated with the University of Minnesota Medical School, is one of the largest research programs in the VA system. The program supports the MVAHCS clinical and education missions by helping to attract and retain outstanding clinicians, providing VA patients access to novel therapeutic modalities and discovering knowledge that improves the health and wellbeing of Veterans.

Our main accomplishment in FY23 was proposing a new Rehabilitation Research and Development Center - Rehabilitation & Engineering Center for Optimizing Veteran Engagement & Reintegration (RECOVER). It was approved and we were awarded over \$6 million in funding.

The focus of RECOVER is improving activities and participation of Veterans with physical disabilities in

important life roles and events through the development and testing of new technologies and interventions. RECOVER incorporates the successful Minneapolis Adaptive Design & Engineering (MADE) program with other research and clinical care experts, including personnel from other existing Minneapolis VA centers – the Center for Care Delivery and Outcomes Research (CCDOR) and the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center (GRECC).

RECOVER is led by Dr. Andrew Hansen, a research biomedical engineer in the Rehabilitation and Extended Care Integrated Clinical Community, and Dr. Erin Krebs, a primary care physician researcher and chief of General Internal Medicine.

Examples of cutting-edge work underway with the RECOVER team includes a collaboration with Cleveland VA's Advanced Platform Technology (APT) center to develop an adaptive rowing seat, developing non-drug

rehabilitation technologies to reduce amputee pain and developing prosthetic footwear specifically designed for women.

In the new year RECOVER will focus on removing barriers to meaningful participation in life activities for Veterans with amputations and/or spinal cord injuries and disorders. Areas of emphasis will include expanding our understanding of barriers and facilitators to participation, improving participation through management of pain, discomfort, and secondary complications, as well as maintaining participation of Veterans as they age and promoting aging in place.

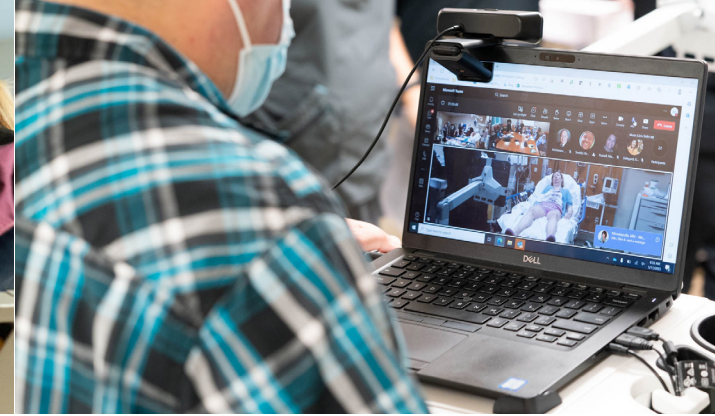
RECOVER will also form a Veteran engagement panel to help guide center activities and to actively engage in research and development projects, as well as a repository for Veterans interested in participating in research studies. The group will also seek to collaborate with other Veteran research and development centers to work on impactful projects to improve health care for Veterans.



*Minneapolis VA staff and U of M students conduct a simulation.*



*Minneapolis VA staff conduct a telestroke simulation.*



# EDUCATION

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## Services

The Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Residency Program (PC-NPR) was established in 2023. This training program, funded by the Office of Academic Affiliations, is designed to develop competent, confident and autonomous new graduate nurse practitioners and equip them with knowledge and skills to address the primary care needs of our nation's Veterans. The first cohort started in September 2023 with three residents.

Our major medical education affiliates include Health Partners Institute, Hennepin Healthcare, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science and the University of Minnesota. This year, the Minneapolis VA Health Care System trained ten advanced fellows, 247 associated health individuals, 323 medical students, 674 physician residents, 171 nursing students and two non-health professionals.

Simulation training is a significant tool used in training. Over 2,000 staff per year are trained at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center using simulation equipment,

methodology or technology for the goal of Veteran and staff education and patient safety.

It is important to be prepared, even in non-trauma center facilities such as the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. This year, to ensure prompt and effective medical stabilization, the Emergency Department (ED) conducted an interprofessional gunshot wound simulation involving VA police, blood bank personnel, physicians, anesthesia providers and nursing staff. This comprehensive simulation, led by dedicated simulation staff and medical students is aimed at testing system protocols, evaluate clinical response readiness and support quality improvement efforts.

The simulation not only highlighted the importance of standardized blood product ordering and communication but also emphasized the need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities during trauma events to optimize team dynamics. Participants valued the review of weapon safety during active shooter situations, improved their

knowledge and understanding of emergency blood release and massive transfusion protocol and identified areas for growth, such as familiarity with the blood bank location and enhanced communication skills in high-stress situations.

The impact of this simulation training surpassed expectations when a real-life gunshot wound victim arrived at the ED and our staff was ready. As a partner to neighboring metropolitan hospitals, the Minneapolis VA remains committed to being clinically ready to support community patients requiring medical overflow.

We piloted a program in 2023, in the learning environment, to better address harassment. The training was around microaggressions - comments or actions that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally express a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group. One priority in 2024 for our team is rolling out our learnings in applications to help in the standardized care of our patients.

# MENTAL

## Health



Clinician Investigator Team (CIT) is a multi-disciplinary team of clinician investigators studying various mental health conditions, mental health impact on daily functioning, mental health risk and protective factors, and mental health treatments in Veterans. In FY23, the CIT promoted mentoring practices that ensure a well-trained and successful next generation of VA scientists and incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion practices.

The Erbes Research Mentorship Award, in honor of the late Dr. Christopher Erbes, was developed in collaboration with the Center for Veteran Research and Education and Mental Health Integrated Clinical Community (ICC). The Minneapolis VA award recognizes excellence in research training and mentoring across all service lines. Dr. Andrew Hansen, director of the Rehabilitation &

Engineering Center for Optimizing Veteran Engagement & Reintegration (RECOVER) center, was the inaugural recipient.

The VA Office of Research and Development-funded summer research program, Service to Science Scholars Research Program (SSS-RP), introduced nine Veteran and military-connected students to mental health research in Veteran populations. Also in 2023, we initiated the Bright Ideas Lunch and Learn (BILL) to support research efforts and foster collaborations.

Peer Support Staff are Veterans who have a lived experience of recovery from a mental health condition. As trained and certified mental health care professionals, they are integrated members of interdisciplinary treatment teams where they work alongside other health

care professionals and bring a unique perspective to the team's approach. They are assigned to various treatment teams/programs and we are very proud to have more than doubled our Peer Support Program within this past year expanding the overall impact of peer support services offered.

Mental Health research yielded 94 publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals in calendar year 2022, and we are on pace to match that in 2023. In FY23, the CIT was awarded \$6,870,048 in total research funds.

The Veterans Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care and Treatment (COMPACT) Act of 2020 was implemented on Jan. 17, 2023. This allows Veterans in acute suicidal crisis to go to a VA or community health care facility to receive free emergency health care. It also covers ambulance transportation costs and inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days and outpatient care for up to 90 days.

In 2023, the Minneapolis VA had 336 Veterans access COMPACT Act benefits with over 1,650 outpatient care visits in the first eleven months of the year.

The Minneapolis VA Suicide Prevention (SP) Program supports the COMPACT Act and works closely with leadership to ensure preventing suicide remains a top clinical priority inside and outside of the Minneapolis VA Health Care System. The SP team has expanded to a 12-member team supporting all Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Vet Centers, and the Community

Resource and Referral Center. The SP team responds to the Veterans Crisis Line (988), and in FY23 we responded to over 1700 Veteran crisis calls.

Regardless of VA enrollment status, COMPACT-eligible individuals are former members of the armed forces who were discharged or released from active duty after more than 24 months of active service under conditions other than dishonorable. Eligibility includes former service members, reserve service members, those who served more than 100 days under a combat exclusion or in support of a contingency operation and those who were the victim of a physical assault of a sexual nature or sexual harassment while serving in the armed forces.

# COMPACT

## Act





# CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT & Civic Engagement (CDCE)



*CDCE facilitated the distribution of donated turkeys for the Thanksgiving holiday.*



*Disabled Veterans participate in the National Disabled Veteran Golf Clinic in September 2023.*



*Red Vest Volunteers at the Minneapolis VA answer questions and help Veterans navigate the hospital.*

In 2023, the Center for Development & Civic Engagement (CDCE), formerly called Volunteer Services, improved on the previous year's successes by working with dedicated volunteers and incredible partners. The Annual Volunteer Recognition Banquet was held for the first time in three years at Earle Brown Heritage Center, with 150 people in attendance.

Our busy escort volunteers averaged 160 runs per day while our Volunteer Transportation Network transported 17,055 Veterans, driving over 673,101 miles and logging 31,418 volunteer hours. We increased our volunteer team by 12 percent in FY23, with a total of 779 volunteers. These volunteers logged nearly 100,000 hours, which was on par with FY22.

The generosity of donors through monetary and in-kind giving was seen in all areas of the Minneapolis VA, from CDCE's Winter Wishes Gift Giving program for the

Community Resource & Referral Center (CRRC), which impacted 100 families in December 2022 to food drives throughout the year that collected more than 2,500 pounds of food for Veterans affected by food insecurity. Total monetary donations in FY23 were nearly \$328,000, while non-monetary donations were \$642,000, a 95 percent increase from the previous year.

Music and art therapy services are now offered in traumatic brain injury rehabilitation, inpatient mental health and pain clinic programs. Animal-assisted therapy and animal-assisted activities grew to seven teams. Integrative modalities expanded within all Recreation Therapy and Creative Arts programs.

Various community spaces allowed opportunities for Veterans to integrate new skills into daily life. New community partnerships included pickleball and adaptive cycling.

Finally, over 150 Veterans engaged in the VA National Creative Arts Festival and Competition, the National Disabled Veterans Winter, Summer, and Golf clinics and the Wheelchair and Golden Age Games.

The Fisher House provided a home to more than 800 families while their loved one was in the hospital. A team of more than 500 volunteers, including group volunteers, helped make the Fisher House a home. They cooked and prepared meals for the families, took care of fall and spring cleanup, planted flowers and saw that general upkeep was tended to throughout the year. This volunteer number was nearly five times higher than in FY22, and in that same time frame, the volunteer hours tripled, with 931 hours logged in FY23. Nearly \$300,000 in monetary donations came into our local Fisher House in FY23. Priorities in 2024 include updating dining room furniture and replacing the current children's outdoor play system with a safe, up-to-date system.



*Dr. Mohammad Bilal conducts an Endoscopic Sleeve Gastroplasty procedure at the Minneapolis VA.*



# GASTROENTEROLOGY

New in 2023 for qualifying Veterans at the Minneapolis VA was the Endoscopic Sleeve Gastroplasty (ESG) procedure. This incision-less procedure, performed by Dr. Mohammad Bilal, uses endoscopic suturing to reduce the size of a patient's stomach. Following the ESG procedure, patients feel fuller when eating smaller portions and they have a better understanding of just how much intake their body needs to lose weight.

One of the biggest impacts this endoscopic procedure has is that it reduces the recovery time, as compared to

the surgical option for sustained weight loss. Dr. Bilal is one of just a few physicians in the Twin Cities area that do the ESG procedure, and one of very few VA physicians providing this service.

Seven ESG procedures were performed at the Minneapolis VA in 2023. Prior to being scheduled for an ESG, the Gastroenterology team and Veteran candidate work with a multidisciplinary team to include the MOVE Program, a nutritionist and a psychiatrist.

One Veteran, who had the ESG procedure last summer, said it has been life-changing. Prior to the procedure she tried, but couldn't lose weight and was depressed. Six months post-procedure she has lost weight, has been able to increase her exercise level and feels healthier.

Several other Veterans are currently preparing themselves for this procedure in 2024.



*Medical Technician Brandon Bell preps a patient for a blood draw at the Minneapolis VA.*



# PATHOLOGY

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## & Laboratory Medicine

Pathology & Laboratory Medicine advancements in 2023 are making an impact on patient visits. We have reduced the need for Veterans to travel around the facility by adding two new satellite blood draw stations. One station is in the new Specialty Care Clinic and the other in the new Primary Care Clinic. This allows Veterans visiting those clinics to have their blood drawn in the same area as their medical appointment. Point-of-care fingerstick testing for blood clotting tests such as international normalized ratio (INR) can also be performed at the satellite sites.

We introduced a new high-sensitivity troponin test in the Emergency Department in November. This will allow

clinicians to more quickly determine whether or not a Veteran is having a heart attack, speeding up the time to admission for a patient with a myocardial infarction and reducing the wait time for patients in the Emergency Department who are safe to go home.

Over the course of the year, we have rolled out rapid PCR testing for COVID-19, influenza A and B and RSV into our Community Based Outpatient Clinics. A single swab is collected, and within 45 minutes, it yields equally sensitive and specific results. This allows for same day prescriptions for patients, therefore reducing the severity of their illness. The Community Resource & Referral Center (CRRC) continues to offer the Binax antigen test

which is very similar to the over-the-counter home tests for COVID.

A part of our breast cancer care program testing for newly diagnosed breast cancer patients has been brought in-house. This offers patients and health care providers quicker answers and assists in creating treatment plans.

For 2024, Pathology & Laboratory Medicine is working with Primary Care and Gastroenterology to roll out a program that mails fecal immunochemical tests (FIT), which detects blood in the stool, to a Veteran's home. An annual FIT has been shown to reduce the death rate from colon cancer. The sample is collected at home, and the return postage is prepaid, making the process easy on the Veteran.

# BEHAVIORAL RECOVERY UNIT

(BRU)

A diagnosis of dementia or Alzheimer's is frightening, so too are distress behaviors that may be associated with the disease, like verbal outbursts, inappropriate behaviors and physical aggression. These often interfere with medical treatment and caregiving that may harm the patient, the caregiver or the treatment team.

While the highly individualized Veteran-centered holistic approach is central to addressing care needs and developing effective behavior plans, it is the commitment of the interprofessional Behavioral Recovery Outreach (BRO) team that make this care model work.

The basic premise is learning about the Veteran and utilizing interventions such as redirecting or offering alternatives to mitigate potential distress. Sometimes it may be as simple as offering different toothpaste to the Veteran who refuses to brush their teeth.

As the BRO team finds behavioral interventions that work for patients, distress behaviors often occur less frequently and may be less severe. This improves quality of life for the Veteran and their caregiver. When the Veteran is ready to return home or be discharged to assisted living or a long-term care facility, the BRO team supports the Veteran and the caregivers by sharing the behavior plan and making visits for up to six months.

In 2023, the BRO team expanded to include a full-time psychiatrist, recreation therapist, a nurse manager and a dementia resource registered nurse. The goal of team expansion is improving patient care and staff education. A variety of health care trainees from geriatric medicine, neurology, nursing, occupational therapy, psychology and pharmacy have trained on the BRU.

The Sunshine Program was created in 2023 and incorporated 33 outdoor activities for Veterans. Staff reported that after each activity the patient's mood significantly improved.

The BRO team members are recognized as national subject matter experts and remain involved in national training efforts and committees. The Office of Academic Affiliations featured the BRO team during VA Health Professions Education Week. The BRU opened in April of 2022 and has enrolled 79 Veterans. Goals for 2024 include rolling out a robust dementia care team and increasing enrollment.

*A Veteran in the Spinal Cord Injury and Disorder Center rounds the bases during a game of baseball at the Minneapolis VA.*





# HOSPICE

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The Rehabilitation and Extended Care Integrated Clinical Community and palliative team predicted an increase in hospice care during the COVID-19 pandemic and the idea of hospice resource nurses was born.

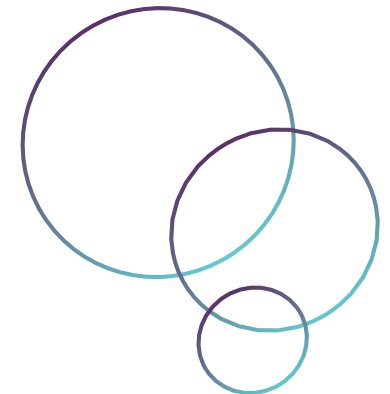
New in FY23 was a strategic initiative for the Hospice Resource Nurse program. At the Minneapolis VA, the program includes three full-time experienced hospice nurses who are available virtually or in person for consultation.

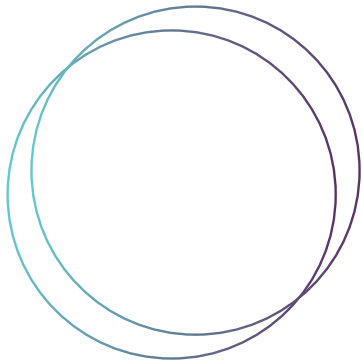
They respond to hospice-related questions and support treatment planning for individual Veterans, support and educate nursing staff, as well as educate providers and care teams on Hospice and Palliative Care (HPC) resources. They also facilitate early and appropriate HPC provider consultation, guide referrals to the inpatient unit or home hospice services, serve as an extension of

the HPC physician resources and support and educate families. They provide services such as assessments, integrative therapy, No Veteran Dies Alone, bereavement support, legacy work, comfort carts, and post-mortem care. Because these nurses are not specially assigned, they are available to round throughout the facility and help with hospice-related concerns.

Positive staff feedback and increased bereaved family survey results have indicated this is a successful new addition to the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.

Priorities for 2024 include continuing to offer hospice resource services to the facility and education to staff, families and Veterans.





# PACT Act

The PACT Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange and other toxic substances. The PACT Act adds to the list of health conditions that we assume (or “presume”) are caused by exposure to these substances. This law helps provide generations of Veterans with the care and benefits they have earned and deserve.

## DID YOU SERVE HERE?





If you served on the ground, in the airspace above, in territorial waters, or a ship that called there, you may be eligible for VA benefits and health care for over 300 conditions.

**LEARN MORE** about toxic exposure screening, toxic-exposure related benefits, and VA health care by visiting [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) or calling 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411).



### YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO:

-  **AIR POLLUTANTS:** Burn pits, oil well fires, sulfur fire, sand, dust, and particulates
-  **CHEMICALS:** Agent Orange or other herbicides, pesticides, and depleted uranium
-  **OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS:** Asbestos, lead, fuels, and industrial solvents

-  **RADIATION:** Nuclear weapons testing and ionizing radiation
-  **WARFARE AGENTS:** Chemical warfare agents, nerve agents, and mustard gas

Service members may have been subjected to any of these exposures in any of these areas.

PALOMARES, SPAIN



GUAM



AMERICAN SAMOA



JOHNSTON ATOLL



ENEWETAK ATOLL



THULE AFB, GREENLAND






U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Compensation and Pension (C&P) performs all registry exams at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center to include Toxic Exposure Screening (TES) and Environmental Screening Exams. In 2023, C&P met VA Central Office requirements by providing an average processing time of less than 30 days with less than two percent insufficiency for returned exams.

In 2023 the Minneapolis VA completed over 71,000 TES on Veterans enrolled. Vietnam era Veterans were the largest population for TES, completing 35,275, followed by Post 911 deployed Veterans at over 26,000 TES.

In July, a PACT Act outreach event was held at the Minneapolis VA in collaboration with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). Over 200 Veterans attended the event to learn about eligibility, healthcare and benefits. Over 80 Veterans received or were scheduled for TES, registry exams or environmental health exams. VBA claims processors assisted over 150 Veterans with filing claims, benefits and Intent to File submissions.

2024 Goals include continued outreach efforts to educate Veterans on the benefits they have earned through the PACT Act.

Minneapolis, MN	94,693
Northwest Metro, MN	9,393
Twin Ports, WI	7,762
Maplewood, MN	9,078
Chippewa Valley, WI	5,067
Rochester, MN	4,964
Albert Lea, MN	1,994
Shakopee, MN	4,146
Hibbing, MN	3,617
Mankato, MN (Lyle C. Pearson)	3,283
Rice Lake, WI	3,199
St. James, MN	677
Hayward, WI	1,349
Minneapolis, MN Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC)	2,186
Ely	489
<b>UNIQUE PATIENT TOTALS</b>	<b>100,604</b>
<i>Many Minneapolis patients are also enrolled in CBOC's.</i>	



World War II  
950



Korean War era  
5,235



Vietnam era  
46,074



Gulf War  
3,196



Post 9/11  
26,477

# VITAL

## Stats

ACCESS TO CARE FY23 NATIONAL STANDINGS ALL APPTS			
MINNEAPOLIS	NEW	ESTABLISHED	Appointments Completed <=30 Days
MENTAL HEALTH	3,803	115,577	Established - 79%, New - 57%
PRIMARY CARE	6,773	152,927	Established - 88%, New - 74%
SPECIALTY	72,424	341,574	Established - 80%, New - 67%

WOMEN		
Type of Care	FY23 Unique Patients	FY23 Encounters
Women's clinic primary care	1,891	4,246
Women's clinic gynecology	328	442
General primary care	3,425	6,537
All clinics	9,187	125,486

## Staffing Totals

<b>TOTAL EMPLOYMENT</b> .....	<b>5,120</b>
GS/GM .....	2,706
Title 38 .....	2,022
Physicians/Residents .....	478
Dentists/Residents .....	16
Nurses .....	1,485
Other .....	109

<b>EMPLOYMENT of VETERANS</b>	
No. of Veterans .....	866
Vietnam Veterans .....	21
Disabled Veterans .....	368


<b>EMPLOYMENT of WOMEN</b> .....	<b>3,515</b>
<b>EMPLOYMENT of PERSONS with DISABILITIES</b> .....	<b>614</b>

### OUTPATIENT VISITS

**919,599**


**Unduplicated Encounters**  
**1,178,723**

**FY23 Rurality**  
**Highly Rural = 9,653 • Rural = 49,327 • Urban = 72,345**




**Acute Care Beds**

Average Daily Census 139  
Average Length of stay 6.05 days




**Community Living Center**

Average Daily Census 50  
Average Length of stay 33 days




**Pharmacy Total**

Oupatient Prescriptions 1,819,221  
Monthly 151,602



**FY23 Lab Reports**

Lab Tests 2,782,568  
Outpatient Blood Draws 55,426



**Flu Vaccinations** 46,732

**ANNUAL BUDGET**   
**\$1,498,636,482**



# NETWORK HOSPITAL

## Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC's)

**Northwest Metro, MN**  
7545 Veterans Drive  
Ramsey, MN 55303-7500

**Twin Ports, WI**  
3520 Tower Avenue  
Superior, WI 54880-5335

**Maplewood, MN**  
3100 Kennard Street  
Kennard Professional Bldg.  
Suite 100  
Maplewood, MN 55109-5434

**Chippewa Valley, WI**  
475 Chippewa Mall Drive, Suite 418  
Chippewa Falls, WI 54729-5047

**Rochester, MN**  
3551 Commercial Drive South West  
Suite 400  
Rochester, MN 55902-2876

**Albert Lea, MN**  
2115 East Main Street  
Albert Lea, MN 56007-3920

**Shakopee, MN**  
1555 Lusitano Street  
Shakopee, MN 55379-4661

**Hibbing, MN**  
990 West 41st Street, Suite 88  
Hibbing, MN 55746-3045

**Mankato, MN (Lyle C. Pearson)**  
1400 Madison Avenue, Suite 502  
Mankato, MN 56001-5473

**Rice Lake, WI**  
320 South Access Road, Suite 100  
Rice Lake, WI 54868-8572

**St. James, MN**  
1103 13th Avenue South  
St. James, MN  
56081-5549

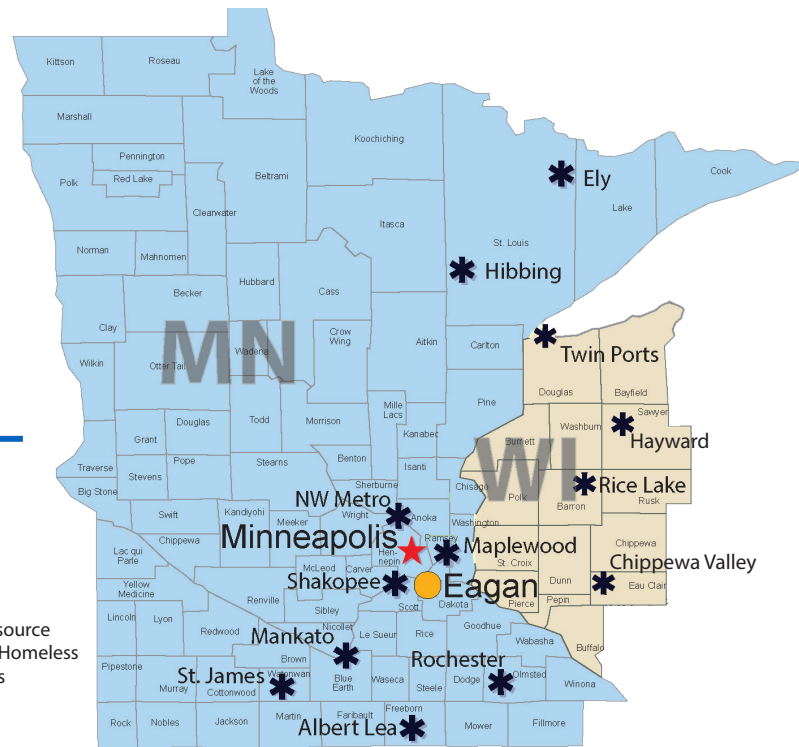
**Hayward, WI**  
10369 State Highway 27  
Hayward, WI 54843-2530

**Ely, MN**  
720 East Miners Drive  
Ely, MN 55731-1400

**Minneapolis VA  
Health Care System**  
One Veterans Drive  
Minneapolis, MN 55417  
[www.minneapolis.va.gov](http://www.minneapolis.va.gov)  
(612) 725-2000

### Clinic Key

- ★ VA Medical Center
- VISN Network Office
- \* VA Outpatient Clinics
- CRRC = Community Resource and Referral Center for Homeless Veterans in Minneapolis



To make an appointment, find out about enrollment, talk with pharmacy or a nurse call 612-725-2000.