

2022

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Eastern Colorado Health Care System

ANNUAL REPORT



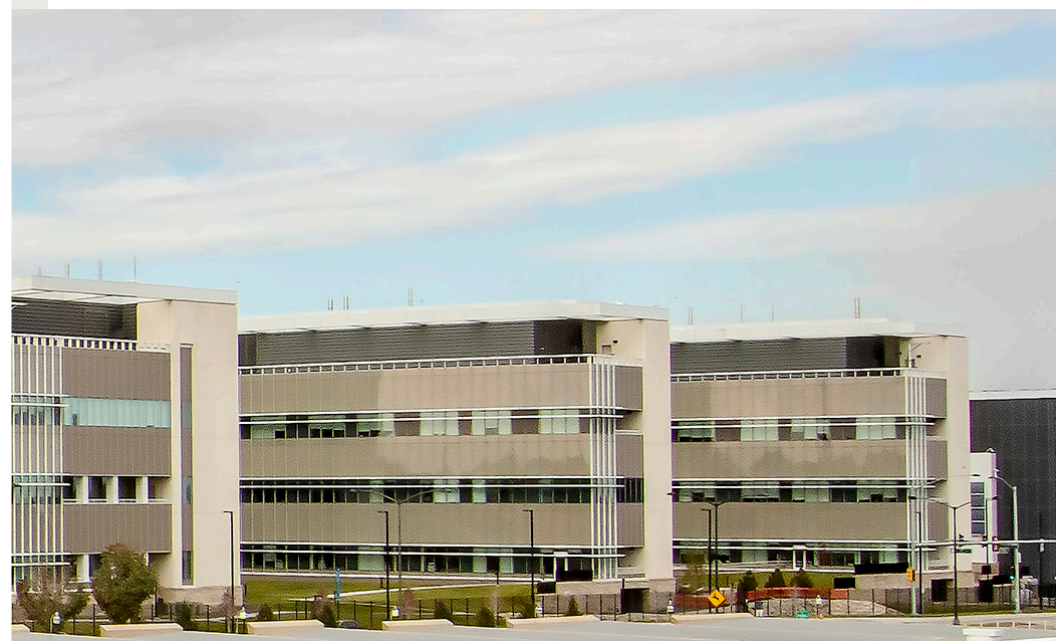
2022

A Year of Partnerships:

Bridging the Rural & Urban Divide

Profile

VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (VA ECHCS) is a Joint Commission accredited, complexity level 1A facility covering more than 44,000 sq. miles. The tertiary campus, Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center, is located in Aurora, Colorado. The health care system has outpatient clinics throughout eastern Colorado: Alamosa, Aurora, Golden, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, La Junta, and Lamar. There are Primary Care Telehealth Outreach Clinics in Burlington and Salida and a 40-bed community living center in Pueblo, CO. Additional free-standing healthcare sites include the Jewell Polytrauma and Low Vision Clinic, the Homeless Domiciliary at Valor Point and the Community Resource and Reference Center (CRRC). VA ECHCS incorporates a Geriatric Research and Education Service, a Mental Illness Research Education Clinical Center of Excellence, and a Center for Innovation for Veteran-Centered and Value-Driven Care. VA ECHCS has a strong academic affiliation with the University of Colorado, supporting more than 1,600 medical students, residents and allied health professionals. VA ECHCS currently has approximately 3,300 employees.



 @VAECHCS |  @VAECHCS |  @VAECHCS

1700 North Wheeling Street, Aurora, CO 80045 | 303-399-8020 | va.gov/eastern-colorado-health-care/

Executive Leadership



Michael T. Kilmer
Director



Shilpa Rungta
Chief of Staff



Michelle Mountfort
Nurse Executive



Thomas Talamante
Associate Director



Amanda Martinez
Assistant Director
Longs Peak



James Crabtree
Assistant Director
Pikes Peak

Sites of Care

Alamosa VA Clinic

622 Del Sol Drive
Alamosa, CO 81101
303-398-6340



Aurora VA Clinic

13701 E. Mississippi Avenue
Gateway Medical Bldg #200
Aurora, CO 80012
303-398-6340



Burlington VA Clinic

1177 Rose Avenue
Burlington, CO 80807
719-346-5239



Golden VA Clinic

1020 Johnson Road
Golden, CO 80401
303-914-2680



Jewell VA Clinic

14400 East Jewell Avenue
Aurora, CO 80012
303-283-5400



La Junta VA Clinic

100 Carson Avenue, Suite 104
La Junta, CO 81050
719-383-5195



Lamar VA Clinic

1401 South Main Street,
Suite 2
Lamar, CO 81052
719-336-0315



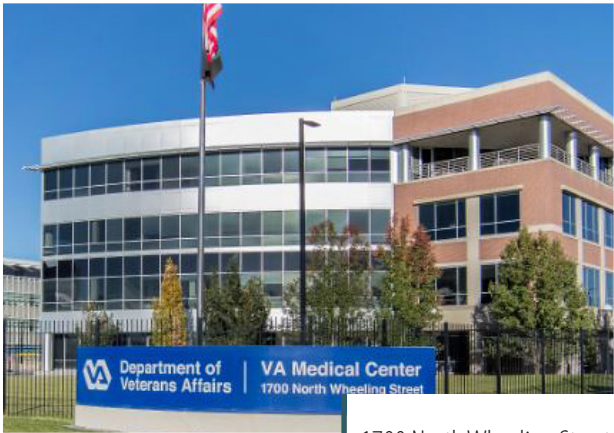
PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom VA Clinic

3141 Centennial Blvd
Colorado Springs, CO 80907
719-327-5660



PFC James Dunn VA Clinic

4776 Eagleridge Circle
Pueblo, CO 81008
719-553-1000



Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center

1700 North Wheeling Street
Aurora, CO 80045
303-399-8020



Salida VA Primary Care Telehealth Outreach Clinic

920 Rush Drive
Salida, CO 81201
719-539-8666



Union Boulevard VA Clinic

3920 North Union Boulevard,
Premier Health Plaza, Suite 200
Colorado Springs, CO 80907
719-327-5660

Message from the Director



Michael Kilmer
Director, VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System

Dear Veterans, volunteers, and friends

We serve a diverse population of Veterans at VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (VA ECHCS). We are proud to care for men and women across the full spectrum of ages, races, gender, era of service, and geography. It is our duty and our honor to serve all who have served.

This year we added a new Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager to improve our outreach and engagement with marginalized groups. This has helped increase the visibility and awareness of the special emphasis programs that exist in all federal agencies. The program has also helped us to be more present in our community to support those groups, including our first-ever appearance at the Denver Pride Parade in June, where we were joined by the Honorable Denis McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Women Veterans are the fastest-growing group of VA patients. In Eastern Colorado, women make up 14% of our patients, compared to 10% of VA patients nationally. We know it's important that VA creates spaces that are safe and welcoming for women Veterans, so the new Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program Center that will open next year will have 25% of their beds dedicated to Women Veterans in a women-only wing. Our quarterly women's town halls allow us to get valuable feedback directly from Veterans and we will continue to use that information to improve women's experience at VA ECHCS.

An important focus for FY22 was our rural Veterans and partners. Our strategic planning team looks at our Veteran population to determine where we can focus our resources for the greatest impact. The declining population in rural Colorado has led to a shortage of medical professionals and medical services in small towns, and we have not been immune to that. Virtual care options like telehealth appointments can help bridge that gap and increase access to medical care. However, we have found that many of our Veterans in rural areas prefer in-person appointments, while telehealth has a broader appeal to urban Veterans that may be younger or have better internet access. With this in mind, we are looking at innovative solutions to keep our VA services in the towns where Veterans need them. Over the course of this year, we developed a concept to pioneer a model where the healthcare team provides in-person care in rural clinics and telehealth care to urban Veterans. This turns the typical model on its head to provide the care that Veterans need where they need it. We are currently working on a plan to roll out this model.

We have also expanded our collaboration with partners in the rural areas we serve. This year we grew our community meetings to include resource fairs and town halls, and we incorporated community care providers in these meetings to help improve the community care system. In FY23, we will continue to work with Veteran Service Organizations and other partners in rural areas to ensure that Veterans are receiving the care they need.



2022 Financial Report & Statistics

\$822,064,257 Total

Personnel **\$495,557,675** | Services **\$126,448,816** | Supplies **\$128,753,453**
Equipment **\$12,996,161** Other Expenses **\$58,308,153**

Operating Expenses



1,807 Total

Medical Residents and Students **1,554** | Other Clinical Trainees **253**

Education Statistics



Community Care Budget

\$299,834,698



3,378 FTE (FTE = Full-Time Employee)

Medical Services (FTE) **2,841** | Medical Support (FTE) | **327** Other (FTE) **210**

Staffing Statistics



Research Statistics

\$24,175,141 Total research funded

Principal Investors **180** | Research Projects **466**



211 Total health care center beds

Internal Medicine **58** | Psychiatry **30** | Rehab Medicine **8** | Spinal Cord **26**
Surgery **22** | DOM **37** | Nursing Home **30** (various types of beds)

Workload Statistics



Volunteer Statistics

\$2,279,223.17 Total impact, value of hours worked plus donated

Total Volunteers **414** | Volunteer Hours **45,911** | Donations cash and non-cash **\$1,030,456.21**



2022 Financial Report & Statistics

4,968 Total

Acute **4,835** | Domiciliary **127** | CLC **6**

Admissions



Patient Bed Days

58,497 Total

Inpatient **37,543** | Extended Care **11,380** | Domiciliary **9,574**



1,002,139 Total

Alamosa VA Clinic **4,390**

Aurora VA Clinic **26,504**

Burlington VA Clinic **1,582**

Golden VA Clinic **73,695**

Jewell VA Clinic **31,7433**

La Junta VA Clinic **3,562**

Lamar VA Clinic **1,906**

PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom
VA Clinic **186,175**

Outpatient Visits



PFC James Dunn

VA Clinic **51,393**

Rocky Mountain Regional

VA Medical Center **595,342**

Salida VA Clinic **1,316**

Eligible Veteran Population in Catchment Area

216,478



102,007

Women Veterans Treated **12,529**

Unique Patients



Rocky Mountain Fisher House

450 families

Accommodated families **450** | Average length of stay **7 days** |
Monetary donations received **88,542.39** | Non-monetary donations received
(comfort items, pantry and meals) **6,947.32**



\$2,279,223.17 Total

Registered My HealtheVet users **67,445** | Secure messages received **224,946**

My HealtheVet FY22



Accreditation & Certification



Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition Dietetics (ACEND)



American Association of Blood Banks (AABB)



American Board of Physical Therapy Residency and Fellowship Education (ABPTRFE) for Physical Medicine Rehabilitation Services, Orthopedic Residency



American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) Geriatric Emergency Department verification



American College of Radiology (ACR)



American Psychological Association (APA) for Behavioral Health (pre-doctoral internship, post-doctoral fellowship, MIRECC)



American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) for Pharmacy Residencies (PGY1 Pharmacy Practice, PGY2 Geriatrics, PGY2 Psychiatry, PGY2 Health System Pharmacy Leadership Administration)

Annual Workplace Evaluation (AWE) and VEGA

Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC)

College of America Pathologist (CAP)

Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)

Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) for Dental Residency

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) accreditation for both lab and mammography

Geriatric Surgery Verification

Joint Commission (JC)

Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)

Office of Behavioral Health 27-65



Awards & Recognitions

Level 1 Geriatric Surgery Center of Excellence

RMR VA Medical Center has become the first VA medical center designated as a Level 1 Geriatric Surgery Center of Excellence. During this process, Veterans who are 75 years and older and scheduled for inpatient surgery will be followed by the VA ECHCS Aging Veteran Surgery Wellness team. Their goal is to identify vulnerabilities in this population before surgery and improve surgical outcomes. RMR was the third hospital in the U.S. to achieve this designation.

Rocky Mountain Region Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nurse of the Year

Curt Klass, MSN, RN, CWOCN, PHN was named the 2021 Rocky Mountain Region Wound, Ostomy, and Continence (WOC) Nurse of the Year in October 2021. Each year, a WOC Nurse is selected from the 5-state area (Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming) based on their contributions to this nursing specialty. Klass was chosen based on his leadership and mentorship contributions within this specialty field

5280 Magazine Top Doctors

Fifteen VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System doctors were recognized as top doctors in the Denver area by 5280 Magazine. The magazine asks area doctors to nominate those that they would trust with their own care or the care of their loved ones. These VA ECHCS physicians were recognized with the honor:

- **Joseph Cleveland**,
Thoracic & Cardiac Surgery
- **David Coons**, Spinal Cord Injury Medicine
- **Rodrigo Donalisio Da Silva**, Urology
- **Nathan Grohmann**, Otolaryngology
- **Carolyn Horney**, Geriatric Medicine
- **Alkesh Jani**, Nephrology
- **Payal Kohli**, Cardiovascular Disease
- **Ashley Lane**, Gastroenterology
- **John Messenger**, Interventional Cardiology
- **Meredith Morcos**, Rheumatology
- **Jane Reusch**,
Endocrinology-Diabetes & Metabolism
- **Gregory Schwartz**, Cardiovascular Disease
- **Elizabeth Somes**,
Hospice & Palliative Medicine
- **Paul Varosy**,
Clinical Cardiac Electrophysiology
- **Stephen Waldo**, Interventional Cardiology



Awards & Recognitions



Regional Nightingale Nominees

The Nightingale Awards, given since 1985, are Colorado's highest nursing honor. Nightingale nominations recognize excellence in nursing practice and highlight nurses who change the way care is delivered.

- **Jeanne Aikin**, chief nurse - Inpatient Specialty Medicine Leadership in an administrative role
- **Amanda Lopez**, RN - Pueblo CBOC Advocacy in a clinical practice role

Jeannie Aikin, posing here with Janice Bodley, is recognized at the Nursing Recognition Ceremony on May 31, 2022. Jeannie was nominated for a Nightingale Award, Colorado's highest nursing honor.

Awards & Recognitions

Daisy Awards

The DAISY award is an international program that rewards and celebrates the extraordinary clinical skill and compassionate care given by nurses every day.

ECHCS FY22 Recipients:

- **Marie Manzanares** – Pueblo CBOC
- **Karie McKinney** – COS CBOC
- **Ryan Hales** - H2 – Inpatient Psychiatric Care
- **Debra Mayhew** – Hemodialysis
- **Jaslie Louis** – K2 Medical/Telemetry
- **Argie Medina** – K2 Medical/Telemetry
- **Dana Richards** – K2 Medical/Telemetry
- **Tamara Roesler** – K2 Medical/Telemetry
- **Susan Kammerzell** – Peri-op
- **Mary Maddox** – Peri-op

VA Patient Safety

The VA Patient Safety Center of Inquiry – Suicide Prevention Collaborative (PSCI-SPC), led by Dr. Bryann DeBeer and located at the Rocky Mountain MIRECC for Suicide Prevention, received a commendation from Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough. PSCI-SPC works to pilot novel Veteran suicide prevention learning collaborative models in the community. The center also develops new Veteran suicide prevention psychotherapy models for Veterans in community care who are ineligible for VA care. This commendation recognized the Center's work to create community partnerships that promote well-being for Veterans and improve social determinants of health.



Accomplishments

Veteran homelessness in the Denver metro area has declined by 30% in the last two years. This is the result of a collaborative care model between VA social work, city government and local non-profits.

The Wound/Ostomy Department at VA ECHCS started the first virtual Ostomy Support Group for Veterans in November 2021. This support group meets monthly and provides additional education and support to Veterans and their caregivers related to ostomy management.

VA ECHCS signed a **Department of Defense** (DoD) sharing agreement for joint surgical services in the Pikes Peak area, and cases have already begun at the U.S. Air Force Academy Hospital and Evans Army Community Hospital at Fort Carson.

VA ECHCS hosted the **National Advisory Committee** meeting for the VA Voluntary Services and Center for Development and Civic Engagement. This annual event brings together staff, volunteers and Veteran Service Organizations from across the country to celebrate and plan the future of VA Voluntary Services. VA ECHCS hosts this event again in 2023.



Accomplishments



Rocky Mountain Fisher House marked two years of service with an anniversary celebration. The Fisher House didn't have a ribbon cutting due to opening during the pandemic, so this was the first opportunity to celebrate the Rocky Mountain Fisher House's new location and accomplishments over the last two years.

To mark this Armed Forces Day, VA ECHCS dedicated a new **Blue Star Memorial Marker** on the Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center campus. The Blue Star Marker was given to VA ECHCS through a collaboration between the Colorado Elks Association and the Colorado Federation of Garden Clubs.



Projects Looking Forward

A replacement facility was approved for the Aurora VA Clinic.



A new clinic was approved for Castle Rock to offer primary care and mental health services.



Garden of the Gods specialty care clinic will open in Colorado Springs in 2023.



Construction is ongoing on a new Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (PTSD-RRTP) with anticipated completion in 2023.

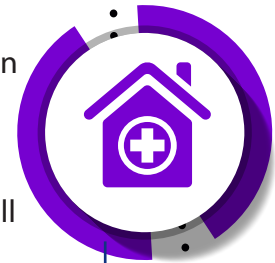
A replacement facility for the Denver VA Clinic is in the process of site selection.



A new clinic is anticipated to open on Space Center Drive in Colorado Springs in July 2023. This clinic will provide primary care and mental health care.



An expansion of the Union Blvd VA Clinic is expected to open in April 2023. This will increase primary and mental health care at Union Blvd.



Outreach

VA Eastern Colorado Post-Pandemic Outreach Advances Rural Strategy

By Dustin Senger, Deputy Public Affairs Officer

When Michael Kilmer was appointed director of VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS) in September 2019, he was eager to hit the road. As the top executive for a health care system that covers more than 44,000 square miles, he knew meaningful, trust-building engagement required travel.

"We serve roughly 100,000 Veterans in a catchment area with distinct urban and rural communities," said Kilmer, about a system that spans from the storied streets of Denver to the agricultural heartland of the Eastern Plains, from Western Kansas to the San Luis Valley.

"To best serve our diverse population, we will engage community leaders and providers and learn from our Veterans," said Kilmer. "Veterans return home to communities and VA is part of each community."

With hospitals recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, and vaccines widely available, restrictions on in-person gatherings began lifting. Gatherings had been transitioning from in-person to virtual, but many rural participants struggled with new technological barriers.

Kilmer first hit the road in November 2021 with his assistant director. After rounding with employees at Lamar VA Clinic, they greeted commissioners in the Prowers County mezzanine. The county Veteran service officer introduced the public health director, then providers, then Veterans. They talked about access to care and Veteran needs and circumstances.



Director Michael Kilmer, VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS), celebrates local VA providers Aug. 9 during a town hall at Lamar Senior Center in Lamar. With stops in Burlington, Lamar, La Junta, Alamosa and Salida, Kilmer was offering his first series of town halls since getting appointed director of VA ECHCS in September 2019.

"It was clear right away that it would be important for us to consistently show up and listen," said Kilmer. "It's not enough to meet people and hear them out. We need to show action. When we cannot instantly address an issue or resolve a concern, we need to take notes and follow up."

Similar gatherings unfolded in La Junta, Alamosa and Salida then Canon City, where a growing Veteran population asked for its own VA clinic. Kilmer had traveled nearly 700 miles with service chiefs and program experts joining virtually via Microsoft Teams. He would cement it as a quarterly effort.

"People don't believe it," said Brian McCain, Action 22 chief operating officer, during a Dec. 7 podcast with Kilmer. Action 22 is a non-partisan organization that leads action on public policy for 22 counties in Southern Colorado. "This is the first time that they've seen somebody from the VA coming out to these areas to listen to their concerns, to talk with them, to look at them face-to-face."

"That's why I feel duty bound to be out to our clinics and in the communities at least once a quarter," said Kilmer. "All our communities are welcoming—they're glad to see us—but it ranges on where they fall as far as if they believe it. That is why we are doing everything we can to put our actions to results."

The level of trust was tested in March. A week before VA market assessments published with recommendations to close clinics in Burlington, Lamar, La Junta and Salida, Kilmer traveled to each town with his strategic planner to explain the recommendations and discuss possible paths forward.

"A lot of this data was based off pre-COVID," said Kilmer about the nationwide assessments, facing community leaders, providers and Veterans in La Junta. "Rural communities were negatively impacted (by COVID-19) and lost a lot of providers."

"One of the reasons why I'm out, besides forearming you with this information, is to start a dialogue on what is the right opportunity with the VA in the local community, and maybe in a new way."

With rural Veterans overwhelmingly asking for face-to-face care, community providers unsure about taking on hundreds of VA patients and commissioners penning letters rejecting clinic closures, senators signaled that they would not appoint an Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission to move forward with the current recommendations.

"The MISSION Act recognized a need for the VA to do a better job of assessing its resources," said Kilmer, pointing to the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act, which requires assessments every four years. "Do we have the right services, the right resources in the right locations?"

VA empowered its health care leaders to get the most current and insightful data available and consider the COVID-19 pandemic's local impacts.

Advancing a rural strategy, Kilmer posited a "reverse telehealth" program where rural VA providers focus on telehealth to urban Veterans. He expected to retain in-person access for rural Veterans while increasing telehealth capacity for urban Veterans, those adept to virtual modalities.

Outreach

Discussions with hospital executives reinforced a need for community care liaisons at each VA outpatient clinic. The liaisons would offer an on-site resource for area providers and Veterans.

With first-hand knowledge of Kilmer's rural strategy, community leaders encouraged Veterans to use their earned benefits. Signs popped up along roads that said, "Enroll now" and "Save our VA clinic."

"Every enrolled Veteran brings VA resources to our communities," said Kilmer. "If you don't need it now, you may one day."

With the green light for larger gatherings, he traveled in August with an outreach team, including an enrollment registrar. They hosted resource fairs and town halls.

On Aug. 10, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, or the PACT Act, was signed into law, expanding VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances.

Kilmer says another 100,000 Veterans may be eligible for care from VA ECHCS.

"My question for our team now is, 'How do we build the best toxic exposure screening and care site?'"



Director Michael Kilmer, VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS), speaks with Chaffee County Veterans about access to care Aug. 12 during a town hall at American Legion Post 64 in Salida. With stops in Burlington, Lamar, La Junta, Alamosa and Salida, Kilmer was offering his first series of town halls since getting appointed director of VA ECHCS in September 2019.



Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough views the display for Medal of Honor recipient PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom during his visit to the PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom VA Clinic in Colorado Springs on June 24, 2022.



Director Michael Kilmer meets with rural Veterans in southern Colorado during his rounding in August 2022. Town hall meetings provided Veterans an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about VA healthcare.

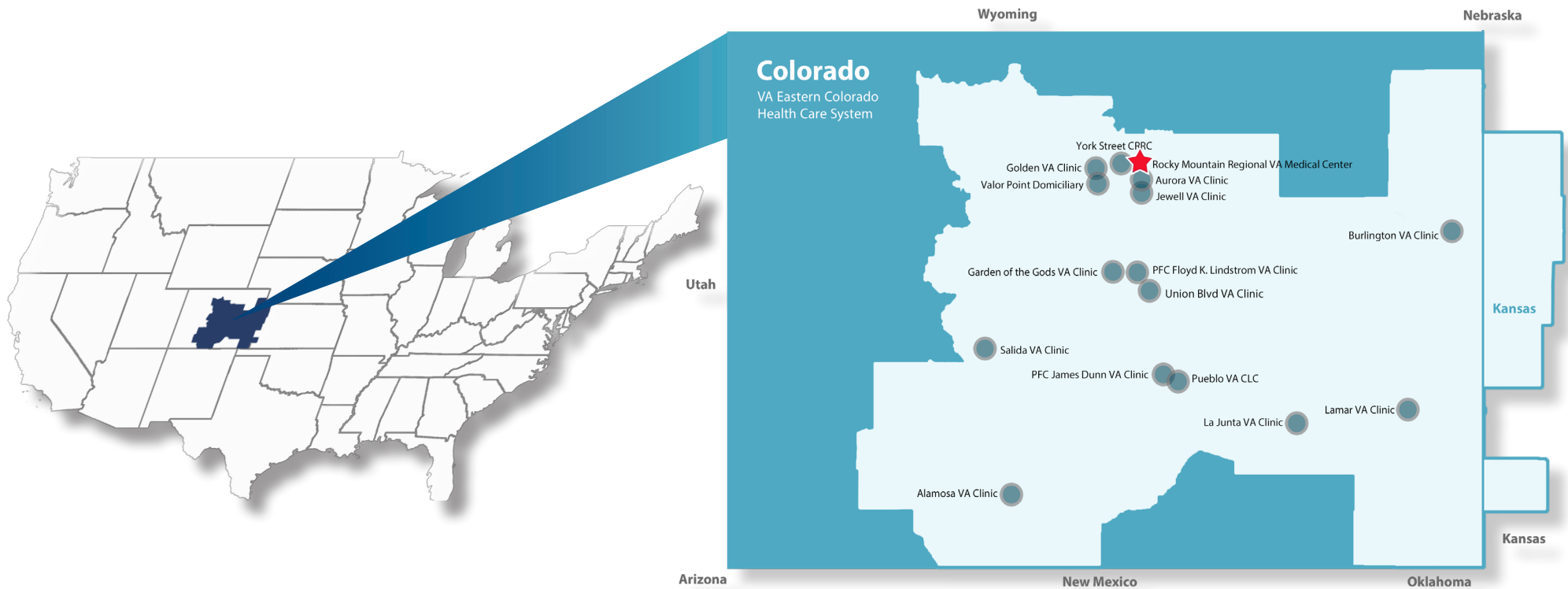


Colorado Avalanche Coach Jared Bednar and defenseman Erik Johnson visit Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center with the Stanley Cup on July 4, 2022.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Eastern Colorado Health Care System



1700 North Wheeling Street, Aurora, CO 80045

| 303-399-8020

| va.gov/eastern-colorado-health-care/