

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration

2021

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

75 VETERANS
HEALTH
ADMINISTRATION
YEARS

A Legacy of Service. The Future of Care.



A Legacy of Service. The Future of Care.

Operating the largest integrated health care system in the United States especially during a global pandemic, is a formidable task. Providing comprehensive health care for America's Veterans—a population that continues to become more diverse, with constantly changing health care needs—is not an easy feat.

Yet, the employees and leaders of VHA delivered outstanding accomplishments in 2021 with quality, professionalism, and commitment to our Mission.

Over the past 75 years of VHA's history, our legacy of service to the Veteran is clear. This year especially, our key purpose of providing Veterans the world-class health care they have earned has remained at the forefront.

Every day, over 380,000 employees serve the evolving health care needs of more than 6 million enrolled Veterans. Our Mission sets the highest expectations for our committed staff and leaders and is our greatest privilege to fulfill.

Veterans have told us they increasingly trust the VHA to deliver the health care they need (up 24% since 2014). In addition to our hard-working VA staff, Veteran Service Organizations and many volunteers work closely with us to advocate on behalf of Veterans and ensure they receive the quality care they need.

Seventy-five years ago, VHA's first medical director, Major General Paul Hawley, MD, intended to build "the greatest medical program in the history of the world." That promise continually inspires and challenges us as we work daily on behalf of Veterans.

The current global pandemic has called forth new courage from many of our front-line staff in harm's way, breakthrough clinical innovations, system adjustments, and generous cooperation across the entire VHA network.

While we have lost Veterans and employees to COVID-19, we have safely taken care of Veterans during this national emergency, promoted needed vaccinations, and supported the U.S. health care system with heroic VHA health care professionals volunteering for missions where additional help is needed.

The most difficult part of creating this "21 Key Accomplishments in 2021" was selecting from the countless activities and innovations each of you has done to make this agency and health care system the best it can be. Thank you to each of you for an incredible year.

I am extremely honored to lead VHA's team of committed employees as we continue our legacy of service and transform the future of care.



Steven Lieberman

Steven L. Lieberman, MD, MBA, FACHE

Deputy Under Secretary for Health,
Performing the Delegable Duties of the
Under Secretary for Health

1 Collaborative Response to the Global Pandemic

In January 2021, national daily totals for new cases, hospital admissions, and deaths reached the highest points of the pandemic. The spread of COVID-19 declined through spring 2021 and reached a low point in June 2021.

As that decline was occurring, variants of the virus responsible for COVID-19 became more prominent. First, the Delta variant emerged as the dominant form in the United States. Soon after, the highly-contagious Omicron variant was escalating in cases and hospitalizations to record levels as the year ended.

Vaccination was a major element of VHA's response and its foremost challenge during 2021. As vaccines became available, VHA undertook an extensive effort to vaccinate America's Veterans, our employees, and others through enterprise-wide coordination and collaboration.

By the end of 2021, VHA administered more than [9 million vaccines and booster doses](#), and fully vaccinated 4.3 million people. This includes Veterans, medical staff, and caregivers. Also included in this number are more than 104,000 individuals who received a vaccine through the Save Lives Act, which allows Veterans, spouses, and caregivers to get a vaccine at a VA medical facility regardless of where they get their health care.

Testing played a critical role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and VHA worked hard during 2021 to ensure PCR and Rapid Tests were administered to Veterans, their caregivers, and medical staff working on the front lines of this health crisis.

By the end of 2021, VHA completed 6.3 million COVID tests, with results available on an average of 1.3 days. In addition, VHA also conducted more than 133,000 virtual COVID-19 screenings for Veterans.

These efforts have played an essential role in mitigating the spread of coronavirus at VA medical facilities.

Caring for older Veterans is one of VA's most important responsibilities. VHA runs over 134 Community Living Centers (CLCs) throughout the country and provides support to 160 State Veteran Homes (SVHs), which are owned and operated by state governments.

Older Veterans are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Old age is one of the major contributing factors in hospitalization and death after infection with this disease. VHA instituted policies early in the pandemic designed to limit the exposure of CLC residents to COVID-19. Additionally, VHA continues to frequently test all employees in CLCs, regardless of their vaccination status.



VHA employees have spent the pandemic doing what they have done for 75 years: delivering the care that Veterans, their families, survivors, and caregivers need—exactly when they need it most.

—Secretary Denis McDonough

In 2021 VHA focused on bringing equitable care to all Veterans, including Veterans who reside in rural communities; Veterans who are people of color (POC); lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and related identities (LGBTQ+) Veterans; and others.

Anticipating hesitancy around the COVID-19 vaccine, VHA tailored messaging and outreach to POC Veterans, including working with community leaders. As a result, in 2021, POC Veterans were vaccinated by VHA at higher rates than their White counterparts.

[Public outreach](#) campaigns, with radio, television, and digital spots, were also launched to encourage rural and hesitant Veterans to get vaccinated. Mobile units were deployed to set up vaccination clinics for remote regions. In addition, VHA worked directly with the Indian Health Services to provide vaccinations to Native Americans residing in rural areas.

2 Research on COVID-19

VHA continued its efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Accelerating COVID-19 Therapeutic Interventions and Vaccines (ACTIV) public-private partnerships.

Working with other federal agencies and private partners, VHA helped lead large-scale clinical trials that have helped test monoclonal antibodies and antiviral medications. These clinical trials will help create new treatment options that improve patient outcomes for people diagnosed with COVID-19.

VHA launched more than [50 research studies](#) related to COVID-19 and published more than 300 articles on the subject. VHA researchers also published the [first comprehensive study](#) of the potential impacts of “long COVID” (post-acute COVID syndrome).

VHA provided managed access to VA health data for external clinical research via the COVID-19 Shared Data Resource program, expanding the volume of research into the health impacts of COVID-19 infection relevant to Veterans.

VHA published two annex reports related to [The Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Response Report](#). These reports transparently detail VHA’s strategic response to the pandemic, key outcomes, and areas of focus moving forward.



3 Patient Services Workforce



During 2021, VHA actively explored ways to ensure the quantity, quality and readiness of its nursing workforce. In the midst of a pandemic, VHA focused on increasing career development and other opportunities for nursing staff.

VHA is the largest employer of nurses in the Nation, and nurses comprise the largest workforce in VHA. Throughout the pandemic VA healthcare workers worked tirelessly, working long hours in an exceptionally challenging environment.

In fact, despite increases in turnover across the entire U.S. health care landscape, VHA retained 90% of its total workforce in 2021, compared to much lower rates of 75-80% retention in private-sector health care.

Furthermore, VA retained 91.2% of its registered nurse (RN) workforce, compared to 81.3% RN retention in the private sector. Our RNs consistently show up to provide the compassionate care for which they are known.

Burnout has remained a challenge for the VHA workforce throughout the pandemic. To understand and address staff burnout more fully, VHA launched the Reducing Employee Burnout and Optimizing Organizational Thriving (REBOOT) Task Force.

4 Here for Veterans Whenever Needed

VHA has leveraged telehealth to maintain the safe delivery of high-quality outpatient VHA services, given pandemic-related social distancing guidelines. As a result, telehealth has experienced a surge in adoption in VHA since early 2020 and continued into 2021.

Prior to the pandemic, VHA had already been a pioneer and leader in telehealth capabilities, and we quickly expanded care options for Veterans, having increased the use of video telehealth in the home by more than 1,000 percent in a matter of months.

VHA provided Veterans more than 9.5 million video telehealth visits to their home or other offsite location, representing an increase of greater than 146% compared to FY 2020 and over 3,100% compared to FY 2019. Overall, when considering all its telehealth modalities, VHA provided more than 2.3 million Veterans with over 11.2 million telehealth episodes of care in FY 2021.

In FY 2021, the number of video-to-home visits to Veterans nationwide in a single day peaked at more than 47,000 visits. This single-day peak exceeds the number of video-to-home visits provided in a single month prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the beginning of the pandemic through the end of FY 2021, more than 27,000 Veterans with COVID symptoms were enrolled in the VA's Remote Patient Monitoring- Home Telehealth (RPM-HT) program and remotely monitored in their homes.

In January 2021, the number of Veterans actively being monitored in a single day topped 2,000, which allowed Veterans to be monitored at home in place of presenting to clinics or urgent care.

Expansion of telehealth has been an essential part of VHA's strategy to enhance the accessibility, capacity, quality, and experience of health care for Veterans, their family members, and their caregivers.

—Dr. Steven Lieberman

VHA closely monitors Veteran satisfaction with the telehealth programs and the services they provide. For example, overall trust in video telehealth care in the home or on a mobile device grew from 81.6% in beginning of FY 2021 to 88.8% at the end of FY 2021.

After experiencing a video visit in the home, 40.2% of surveyed Veterans preferred video telehealth for their care, as opposed to 39.6% who preferred in-person care, 4.4% who preferred telephone care, and 15.7% who had no preference.

During the pandemic, VHA implemented a national digital divide consult process in the electronic medical record to assist Veterans with obtaining the internet connection and technical support they need to access VHA telehealth services.

Social workers help Veterans identify resources (such as VA's 4G Connected tablet program, Federal Communications Commission's Lifeline, Temporary Emergency Broadband Benefit and Everyone On Program) that can assist Veterans in engaging with VA through telehealth.

In FY 2021, VA digital divide consults were completed for more than 66,000 Veterans, which resulted in approximately 59,000 internet-connected tablets being distributed to Veterans, for a total of 108,000 tablets issued overall.

VHA's telehealth capabilities have become a vital part of VHA's health care system. VHA will continue to build on its success and leadership as a provider of digitally enabled care.

By continuing its connected care innovation, VHA will further enhance the human connections that are at the heart of health care and help more Veterans turn to VA as their health care system of choice.



5 Mental Health

Life can be difficult regardless of a global pandemic. VHA offers a variety of mental health treatment options for Veterans, including in-person care at VA and community facilities and telemental health services. For many Veterans, telemental health may be the most accessible and convenient option for care.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, VHA mental health services maintained 92% of previous outpatient workload, utilizing clinical video telehealth into clinics, homes, and other non-VA locations; Clinical Resource Hubs; National Telemental Health Center expert consultations; mobile apps; secure messaging, etc.

Telemental health services usually involve real-time, interactive video visits that occur from home, at a local clinic, or in a medical center. Telemental services available include evaluations, individual and group therapy, couples and family therapy, treatment planning, and medication management.

In FY 2021, VA provided telemental health services to more than 873,000 Veterans during more than 5.6 million visits (greater than 3.2 million more visits than FY 2020).



6 Veteran Suicide Prevention

Suicide prevention remains a top priority for VA and the top clinical priority for VHA, with the most significant amount of resources ever appropriated and apportioned to VA suicide prevention.

VA continues to implement a 10-year strategy, as outlined in the 2018 [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#): to end Veteran suicide through a public health approach that combines both community-based and clinically-based strategies.

VA's latest data in the [2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#) showed a decrease in suicide among Veterans in 2019 from the year prior. The decrease, reflecting the lowest number of Veteran suicides since 2007, provides hope and motivation for continued prevention efforts.

This message is part of the new 2021 report, which includes findings from VA's most recent analysis of Veteran suicide data from 2001-2019. Key report findings include:

- In 2019, the Veteran suicide rate was 31.6 per 100,000, substantially higher than the rate among non-Veteran U.S. adults (16.8 per 100,000).
- Adjusting for age- and sex-differences, the rate among Veterans in 2019 was 52.3% higher than for non-Veteran U.S. adults.

- From 2018 to 2019, there was a 7.2% overall decrease in the age- and sex-adjusted Veteran suicide mortality rate in 2019, while among non-Veteran U.S. adults, the adjusted suicide mortality rate fell by 1.8%.
- The age-adjusted suicide rate for male Veterans decreased 3.8% in 2019 from 2018, while the age-adjusted suicide rate for female Veterans decreased 14.9% in 2019 from 2018.
- Firearms were more often involved in Veteran suicides in 2019 than in 2018 (among Veteran men who died from suicide: 69.6% in 2018, 70.2% in 2019; among Veteran women who died from suicide: 41.1% in 2018, 49.8% in 2019).

VHA launched [Reach Out](#), a new campaign that raises awareness of its mental health resources available for Veterans. Timely evidence-based [public service announcements](#) on firearm safe storage were released as the 20th anniversary of 9/11 approached and the recent events in Afghanistan might spark an array of emotions, along with other stressors.

The messaging ensures that Veterans, their families, friends, and caregivers know they are not alone, and it only takes a moment to reach out and ask for help.

Veterans were encouraged to call the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and select option 1).



7 Keeping Veterans and Other Americans Safe

As the U.S. health care system grappled with the impact of COVID-19 and continuing variants, VHA leveraged the scope and scale of our integrated system to continue to deliver excellence to Veterans. We also went above and beyond to support COVID-19 care and natural disaster responses in the struggling private sector as part of our [Fourth Mission](#).

VA's Fourth Mission is to improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to Veterans, as well as to support national, state, and local emergency management, public health, safety, and homeland security efforts.

As part of this Mission, VHA has provided 937,700 pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE), including gowns, gloves, masks, face shields, Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPR), goggles, shoe covers, and other resources to state and local facilities across the Nation.

Fulfilling our Fourth Mission's humanitarian support, VHA has admitted 657 U.S. non-Veteran citizens for care at VA medical centers (VAMCs) during COVID-19.

VHA deploys personnel to support other VAMCs who have been impacted by COVID-19, as well as provides support to state and community nursing homes. To date, VA has deployed personnel to more than 50 states and territories.

Since the start of the pandemic, VHA has received 194 FEMA Fourth Mission Assignments, which allow VHA personnel to assist where they are needed most. Thousands of VHA Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS) volunteers have deployed 6,284 times to address emergencies across the Nation.



In 2021, DEMPS nurses, doctors, and other staff have volunteered for 4,092 deployments in support of State Veterans Homes, Indian Health Service, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and internal VA VISN-to-VISN missions.

The VHA Office of Geriatrics & Extended Care also developed a State Veterans Home Modernization Plan to address quality of care and safety. The modernization plan will centralize quality and safety oversight toward a standardized model to ensure the highest quality of care and safety for those Veterans.

8 Greater Access to Veteran Care

Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, VHA remained dedicated to ensuring that Veterans receive the highest quality, timely, coordinated care whenever and wherever they need it.

VHA leadership and facility staff worked together during 2021 to improve access and form a Veteran-centric, results-driven, and forward-thinking organization.

- Completed 78.8 million care visits, which is a combination of face-to-face and virtual care by a provider.
- Coordinated more than 6.2 million referrals to community providers for more than 2.4 million Veterans.
- Completed 45,000 daily video (VA Video Connect) visits across Primary Care, Specialty Care, and Mental Health.
- Successfully implemented the No-Show VSignal pilot for mental health, increasing VHA's understanding of why Veterans tend to no-show and help sites improve care delivery to Veterans.
- Completed urgent care referrals to a specialist in under two days, both within VA and in the community, in FY 2021.
- Provided over 1 million community emergency care visits and more than 400,000 community urgent care visits for Veterans nationwide.
- Reduced the New Enrollee Appointment Request (NEAR)

average days from enrollment to appointment create date from 16 days to 3 days.

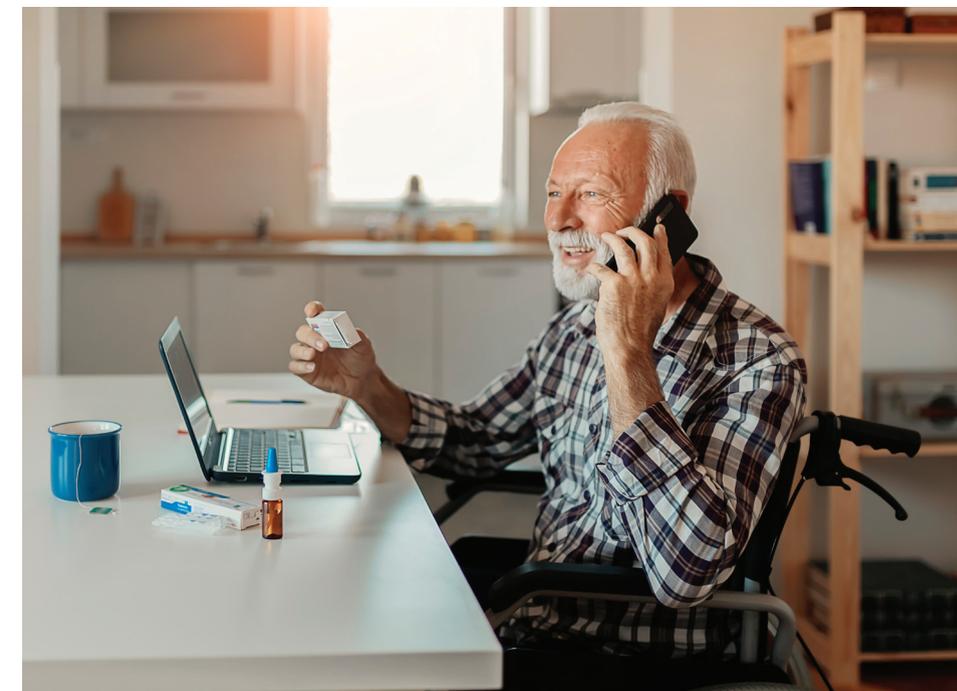
- Lowered the national no-show rate by 2.5% in FY 2021 to 14.32%.
- Received a 75.5% favorable response rate from Veterans to the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) survey when asked if they received appointments as soon as they were needed for both Primary and Specialty Care.
- Implemented the Referral Coordination Initiative (RCI) in nearly 90% of VA care facilities to include care options presented to

all Veterans so each Veteran can make the best decision for how they want to receive their care, whether that care is delivered in-person, virtually and if eligible, in the community.

As an organization, VHA worked collaboratively to improve access to care for Veterans, timeliness, cost savings, and a positive impact on Veterans' awareness of their options.

We'll move heaven and earth to get Veterans timely access to their VA resources.

–Secretary Denis McDonough





9 Building a More Inclusive VA

VA takes pride in the diversity of the Veteran community. Today, about 27% of Veterans are members of a racial or ethnic minority group. By 2045 this number is predicted to rise to 39%.

Women are the most diverse group of Veterans—about 41% of women who used VA health care services in 2021 belonged to a racial or ethnic minority group.

This diversity is a positive influence that Veterans bring with them into their community, their workplaces, and our VA facilities.

Our goal at VA is to provide an inclusive, welcoming environment for all Veterans. At the heart of serving a diverse group of Veterans is a diverse VA workforce. Our providers and staff are racially and ethnically diverse. They're also trained in delivering culturally competent care to Veterans of different backgrounds.

In an effort to improve access to health care for everyone, VHA began the rulemaking process in 2021 to remove gender alterations from the medical benefits package. This process can take up to two years to complete, but starting the process marks a significant step towards improving its care for Veterans who are transgender. VHA provides a full range of gender-affirming medical services, including gender alteration surgeries.

VA and our Nation face great challenges made even more daunting by the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges make it even more important that we have workplaces where everyone is treated well. I am committed to ensuring that employees have what they need to serve our Nation's Veterans as well as those Veterans who have served us. As Americans, we owe a profound debt of gratitude to those who have worn our Nation's uniforms.

—Secretary Denis McDonough

In 2021, VHA re-launched its LGBT Program as the LGBTQ+ Health Program, reflecting new community standards for inclusiveness. It also included a preferred name and gender identifier to its integrated medical record system so that medical personnel use the correct pronouns and names with their patients.

The Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) was formed in 2021, creating a cultural connection that embraces our employee's and Veterans' differences, experiences, knowledge, opinions, perspectives, and other characteristics that make them unique.

ODEI will educate and train our workforce on diversity, equity, and inclusion best practices to enhance cultural awareness, collaboration, innovation, and engagement to resolve complex issues and increase productivity.

This was also the year when VHA increased its outreach to Veterans who received an Other Than Honorable (OTH) discharge. In FY 2021, VHA reached four times as many OTH Veterans with VA health care and mental health services as in FY 2020.

VHA's Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) is playing a major role in developing VA's diverse workforce.

OAA manages affiliations with more than 1,800 unique colleges and universities, including nearly 200 minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Approximately 20,000 health professions trainees from MSIs train at VA each year.

New graduates can take advantage of health professions training and scholarship programs that are designed to increase job opportunities at VA for racial and ethnic minorities.

VA's Office of Research and Development (ORD) chartered an employee-led workgroup on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in VA research.

10 Women's Health Initiatives

[Women's health care](#) remained a top priority for VHA in 2021, with more than 550,000 women Veterans getting their health care through the VA medical system.

In response, VHA has worked to ensure that all VA medical centers (VAMCs) and Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) have at least one Women's Health Primary Care Provider (all VAMCs have at least two).

In an effort to mitigate gaps in women's health personnel, VA launched the Women's Health Innovation and Staffing Enhancement Initiatives (WHISE) and distributed \$75 million in 2021 to the field across all 18 Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) in support of over 400 positions and programs.

These funds helped bolster health positions, secure new health equipment for women, improve staff cultural competencies and enhance health care services provided to women Veterans.

VA has a unique Women's Call Center (1-855-VA-WOMEN) that provides direct outreach to women Veterans who are not utilizing VA health care services. Through both inbound and outbound calls, chat and text, call center staff who are mostly women Veterans respond to questions from women Veterans about available VA services and resources.

In January 2021, Congress passed the Deborah Sampson Act, which will support an open and inclusive culture at VA and will provide greater opportunities for women Veterans to enhance their overall well-being by getting direct care and services related to fertility, newborn treatment, childcare, sexual assault and trauma, and homelessness.



In addition, Section 5101 in the legislation established an Office of Women's Health which reports to the Under Secretary for Health. This structure accelerates progress in specialized health care delivery for women Veterans. By realignment of the Office, women Veteran issues will now be at the forefront of the organization.

11 Volunteers

Isolation from social support is a serious threat for Veterans who suddenly find themselves alone because of public health measures to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

VHA was committed to finding a solution that reduces this risk, launching the Compassionate Contact Corps (CCC). This pre-clinical social prescription program is designed for Veterans who are lonely or socially isolated and provides virtual visits with VA volunteers. The program shows promise in helping Veterans overcome feelings of loneliness and even depression.

Some 1,500 Veterans received virtual visits through CCC, which grew its availability from 8 to 52 medical facilities in 2021.

Participating Veterans who receive a referral from their medical care team are contacted through phone or video visits with trained volunteers.

The program was highlighted in the [New York Times](#), received a 2021 Beryl Institute's Innovation Award, as well as a Federal Executive Board (FEB) award, and was selected as a finalist in VHA's Shark Tank.

12 VHA's 75th Anniversary

In 2021, the VA commemorated 75 years of the Veterans Health Administration.

Originally established in 1946 as the Department of Medicine and Surgery to care for Veterans returning from World War II, VHA has evolved to meet the unique challenges and care needs of Veterans from every era and at every stage of their lives.

Over the past 75 years, VHA has made vast and wide-reaching contributions to improve the health of Veterans and the entire Nation by providing services and technologies that have changed the way health care providers across the country practice medicine.

The historic milestone of its 75th anniversary also served as an opportunity for VHA to recognize the efforts of VHA staff and volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is just the latest example of VHA's long-standing commitment to providing care to Veterans whenever and however they need it.

In addition to the Veterans Health Administration commemorating 75 years, 2021 was also the 75th anniversary year for the [Veterans Canteen Service](#), [VA Voluntary Service](#) (now the VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement), and the [Office of Academic Affiliations](#).

To celebrate its anniversary throughout this year, VHA hosted various events and campaigns to highlight VHA's long-standing commitment to putting Veterans at the center of the care experience, its world-class, mission-driven health care professionals, and its contributions to medical science.

A key 2021 accomplishment of the 75th VHA Anniversary was the development of the "75 Videos for 75 Years," a [library](#) of short videos that highlighted current VHA innovations and creative patient service initiatives, featuring the voices of Veterans and VHA employees. The productions were entirely scripted, taped, and produced by a crew of Veterans.

When someone signs up to serve our country in the military, we make them a simple promise: if you take care of us, we will serve you when you transition out of service. There is no more noble mission in this country than keeping that fundamental, enduring promise. And for 75 years now, the Veterans Health Administration has done exactly that.

—Secretary Denis McDonough

Innovation at VHA

The [VHA Innovation Ecosystem](#) (VHA IE) empowers front-line employees and leverages the collective power of external partners from academia, industry, nonprofits, and other government agencies to facilitate mission-driven healthcare innovation.

This year, through its Innovator Bootcamps, VHA Shark Tank Competition, hackathons, and other initiatives, VHA IE enabled front-line staff to serve as change agents across the VHA enterprise.

13 VHA Innovation Experience

As with the past three years, [VHA Innovation Experience](#) (iEX) not only showcased the boundary-breaking innovation that occurs at the VHA Innovation Ecosystem every day but also allowed Veterans and the public to see how VHA is leading the way in forging a healthier future for Veterans and the rest of the country.

The iEX Talks and iEX Demos included a look at how VA is building an Extended Reality network across VHA, a groundbreaking Smart White Cane, analytic tools for COVID-19, and an open and honest discussion on sexual health and fertility for paralyzed Veterans.

14 VHA Shark Tank Competition

This year's VHA Shark Tank Competition brought front-line innovators into a rousing shark tank-style pitch competition to help spread their work to impact even more Veterans' lives. If you receive care at VA, chances are your experience has already been impacted by innovations from the VHA Shark Tank Competition.

This year, 16 finalists were selected from more than 320 applicants to pitch their "promising practices." During the VHA Innovation Experience, they had three minutes to "sell" their innovation to The Sharks—with Veterans and the health care industry watching.

This year's winners included:

- Billing Resolution Center
- Cancer Prevention Mobile App
- Colorectal Cancer Mailed Screening
- Compassionate Contact Corps
- Inpatient Fall Prevention Real-Time Monitoring
- Syringe Service Program
- Cognitive Impairment Screening
- THRIVE Whole Health Program
- Operating Room Preparation Standardization
- Virtual Reality for Pain and Anxiety Management

15 3D Printing

VHA pioneered the use of [3D Printing \(3DP\)](#) in healthcare through its 3DP Network. Now, VHA Advanced Manufacturing (AM) Hubs, VAMCs with Food and Drug Administration (FDA) registered AM facilities, are delivering customized health solutions and 3D Printed medical devices to Veterans.

When a Veteran experiencing hearing loss came to VA for help, his audiologist worked with the AM team at Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston to design and print a solution that would improve the patient's hearing and avoid surgery. After six prototypes incorporating the Veteran and his VA team's design iterations to fit, finish, and functionality, a personalized ear canal stent was created—the GioStent.

VA received [compassionate use approval](#) from the FDA in February 2021 for the groundbreaking, in-house developed [GioStent medical device](#).

Three 3DP Network sites currently serve as AM Hubs: VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Seattle, Washington; the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, South Carolina; and the Central Virginia VA Health Care System in Richmond, Virginia.

16 Augmented Reality

In 2021, the VHA Innovation Ecosystem and Wellovate announced the launch of a groundbreaking initiative using innovative virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality tools to enhance the care provided to Veterans.

This initiative will enable Veterans at 12 VAMCs across the country to use wearable headsets in VR immersion therapy, effective for managing pain, stress, and anxiety; promoting relaxation; decreasing negative behaviors, and enhancing positive behaviors.



Through a previous three-year evaluation of Veterans using VR tools in inpatient and long-term care settings at the Western North Carolina VA Health Care System, in Asheville, 84% of Veterans reported reduction in discomfort, 89% reported reduction in stress, 96% reported enjoying their experience, and 97% said they would recommend it to their peers.

17 Whole Health

[Whole Health](#) is about what matters to you, not what is the matter with you. The pandemic has accelerated innovation and increased focus on the need to create a health system that encourages self-care and builds well-being.

Whole Health incorporates peer support, complementary and integrative health approaches, health coaching, and a new approach to clinical care into the Veteran experience.

The delivery of Whole Health in virtual settings grew three-fold in 2021, with nearly a half-million Tele-Whole Health encounters.

Veterans can now access services like Whole Health Coaching, Tai Chi, and meditation from the comfort of their homes, surrounded by the people and activities that really matter to them. In response, many VISNs have built Whole Health services into their Clinical Resource Hubs to increase VISN-wide access.

More than 100 on-demand self-care resources for Veterans, family, caregivers, and staff are now available. These [experiential videos](#) include meditation, yoga, breathwork, movement, healthy cooking and more are available on VA social media.

18 Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention

When women Veterans experience harassment at VA facilities, it can affect their health. A national survey of more than 1,300 randomly selected women Veterans at 12 different VA facilities found that one in four of women Veterans reported inappropriate or unwanted comments or behavior by male Veterans on VA grounds.

Women who reported harassment were significantly more likely to report feeling unwelcome at VA, feeling unsafe, and delaying or missing medical appointments.

In April 2021, Secretary McDonough held a virtual [White Ribbon VA](#) ceremony with more than 700 VA senior leaders and Veterans Service Organization heads to underscore VA's commitment to a safe, welcoming, and respectful VA.

In 2021, VHA rolled out a new [campaign](#) at VA health care facilities to remind everyone—patients, providers, and staff—that VA has a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to harassment.

These reminders will meet Veterans where the negative behavior may be happening: in hallways, waiting rooms, public areas, and parking lots of VA facilities.

It only takes one inappropriate comment or action to make someone feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

I will not accept discrimination, harassment, or assault at any level or at any facility within VA. We will provide a safe, inclusive environment for veterans and VA employees.

—Secretary Denis McDonough

The VHA [Assault and Harassment Prevention Office](#) (AHPO) distributed VHA's anti-sexual assault and anti-harassment [policy](#) and how-to-report information to 16 million Veterans.

It has also designated points of contact in every VA facility to receive reports of harassment and sexual assault and provided training.

AHPO leveraged multiple modalities to make bystander intervention training more accessible for [Veterans](#) and VHA employees. This training empowers those who witness appropriate behaviors at VA facilities to take the appropriate action.

In 2021, VHA initiated a [pilot program](#) to improve services for Veterans who have experienced or are experiencing intimate partner violence or sexual assault.

The two-year initiative focuses on strengthening community partnerships, training for VA staff and community partners, identifying effective clinical interventions, and providing outreach to underserved populations.

More than 50,000 individuals have taken the [White Ribbon VA pledge](#). The pledge is now included in the SES swearing in ceremonies, new employee orientations, and leadership programs. 87% of VHA facilities now have White Ribbon VA champions, and several VSO partners have [collaborated](#) to promote White Ribbon VA.



19 Support to Veterans Without Homes

When VA Secretary McDonough visited Los Angeles in October 2021, he challenged local leaders with the goal to house 500 Veterans who were experiencing homelessness by the end of the year. Ensuring that all Veterans have a safe, secure place to live is a top VA priority. In Los Angeles, there are more homeless Veterans than anywhere else in the United States.

The VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (VAGLAHS) staff and its community partners connected with individual Veterans and worked closely with each of them to determine their needs, so the goal set by the Secretary was achieved.

More than 750 Veterans (590 in Los Angeles County) were provided housing, through a variety of temporary, transitional, and permanent housing programs. About 45% have been placed in permanent housing.

VA conducts coordinated outreach to proactively seek out Veterans in need of assistance. It connects homeless and at-risk Veterans with housing solutions, health care, community employment services, and other required supports. It also collaborates with federal, state, and local agencies, employers, nonprofits, and others to expand housing and employment options for Veterans exiting homelessness.



The [Supportive Services for Veteran Families](#) (SSVF) made significant strides towards reducing Veteran homelessness in 2021, providing almost 68,000 Veterans and their families with services that helped find permanent or temporary housing and increased access to health care.

This effort includes a collaboration between the VA Homeless Program Office (HPO) and Office of Connected Care (OCC) which provided almost 50,000 smartphones to Veterans who were transitioning to permanent housing, thus providing them access to telehealth services.

SSVF also worked to place nearly 32,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness into hotels and motels in 2021. This was part of an effort to shield a population that is often medically at-risk of developing health conditions from COVID-19.

Every once in a while, you run across these phrases in the English language that shouldn't really exist. I think one of those phrases is "homeless Veteran." As long as I'm here, I'm going to do everything I possibly can to get them into housing.

—Secretary Denis McDonough

20 Million Veteran Program

Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2021, the [Million Veteran Program](#) (MVP) excels as a national research program to learn how genetics, lifestyle, and military exposures can affect health and illness.

Veterans who partner with MVP contribute to improving the lives of fellow Veterans and, ultimately, everyone. Scientific discoveries from MVP are already underway, helping us reach our goal of transforming health now and for future generations.

Since launching in 2011, over 850,000 Veteran partners have joined one of the world's largest programs on genetics and health. Over 80,000 women Veterans have joined MVP (9%), making important research on women's health issues possible.

Blood samples provided to the Million Veteran Program are processed and stored in a core Biobank laboratory facility at the VA Boston Healthcare System. The laboratory is a fully equipped, state-of-the-art biological specimen collection and processing center.

The lab provides local and national VA researchers with a convenient, high-quality, low-cost mechanism for biological specimen handling, storage, and analysis in clinical studies and research projects.

At its 10-year milestone, MVP has led to discoveries in areas important to Veterans and its [research projects](#) give new insights that could point to some possible next steps for testing new treatments.

For example, a large MVP study found new genetic markers for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) risk. The researchers found 18 specific markers on the human genome associated with increased susceptibility to PTSD.

Another MVP study showed that a genetic risk model could accurately predict [breast cancer](#) in a large group of women Veterans. By scanning a patient's genome for gene variants using this tool, doctors can create individualized breast cancer screening and risk-reduction plans.

In the largest genetic study on [anxiety](#) to date, VA researchers found new evidence of the underlying biological causes of the disorder, based on MVP data. This could lead to a new understanding and treatment of the condition, which affects one in 10 Americans.

MVP's goal is to reach the milestone of one million Veterans enrolled by July 1, 2023. If you are a Veteran, [sign up today](#).

21 Caregivers

Caregivers are essential members of the care team for many Veterans who receive their health care through the VA health care system, and in 2021 VHA made specific efforts to provide these individuals with additional support and services.

This included COVID-19 testing for caregivers in the [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#) (PCAFC) and an expansion of vaccination efforts to include all Veterans, spouses, and caregivers as part of the SAVE LIVES Act.

VHA also expanded the PCAFC eligibility to include Veterans that served before May 7, 1975, increasing unique Veteran participants from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War by 161% in the program. Veterans of all eras will be eligible for the program starting October 1, 2022.

By improving caregiver outcomes, we improve Veteran outcomes—and we at VA are going to stop at nothing to do both.

—Secretary Denis McDonough

VHA will continue to focus on four pillars to support caregivers: advocacy, access, outcomes, and excellence, especially as the stress of managing a household and Veteran's medical conditions during a pandemic remains so difficult.



VA



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