

Women in Leadership Impact Award VA winners

1. [Pamela Powers, acting deputy secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#)

Deputy Pamela Powers is an Airforce Veteran who understands that as a female leader in any position — when fighting an adversary — she needed to anticipate resistance and be adaptable to changing conditions. She brought this mindset to VA and is focused on bringing that same level of operational urgency to the department, making sure it carries out the mission President Lincoln gave after the Civil War: “caring for those who have borne the battle.” Upon joining the organization, Powers knew right away the nearly 380,000 medical professionals working at VA across the country cared about VA’s mission and wanted to help make things right. Her commitment, to providing insight and direction on a way to move VA forward, is apparent as continuous changes to improve Veteran outcomes surpassed expectations.

Under Powers’ leadership VA created a bottom-up, learning organization — one that listens to staff members who are closest to their patients, using that input to get better results for Veterans. One of VA’s first major tests to this approach was implementation of the MISSION Act, which created a permanent program that lets Veterans get their care in the community. To prepare for this historic change, VA built a military operations-style command center at VA headquarters to coordinate and stay engaged with 170 medical centers and more than 1,200 clinics. In doing so, Powers she ensured the department shared best practices for implementing this new law by creating training protocols to ensure the staff was ready to help deliver this new benefit to Veterans.

Powers’ direction and guidance on a communications strategy provided clear, understandable information to 9 million Veterans enrolled at VA about their new options for care. Since, VA employees across the nation have brought about the most radical change to Veterans’ health care since the end of World War II, with more than 2.5 million Veterans using the program over the last 16 months.

Her focus and dedication to real transformation and modernization at the VA, showed what a committed, bottom-up organization can do when its employees know their voices count. This was shown evident at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic — VA facilities across the country took proactive steps on their own to protect Veterans. Many took the initiative to check in with mental health patients by phone if they couldn’t be seen in person, to ensure that isolation wasn’t becoming a new danger. They opened drive-by facilities that Veterans could use to pick up prescriptions, medical equipment or even food in a way that reduced contact with others. Others found creative ways to take unused or under-used space and convert it to negative pressure rooms or floors for COVID-19 patients. As a leader, Powers understands the importance of uniting the workforce to meet the mission of the organization. VA staff’s response to COVID-19 showed real resiliency and adaptability in the face of a rolling crisis that created uncertainty from day to day.

Powers' understanding of VA staff's commitment to embracing technology is a critical factor in how Veterans receive care in 2020. The use of this technology to consult and even diagnose Veterans during this period of social distancing grew by 1,100%, and much of that growth reflects VA's delivery of mental health counseling and care through telehealth connections.

As a leader in 3D medical printing that is on the cusp of bioprinting tissue and bone for patients, during COVID-19, Power's leadership in this field paid off, with the department adapting on the fly and printing PPE supplies for staff and patients.

While dealing with the coronavirus, Powers understood that the organization couldn't ignore its commitment to implementing a modernized health record for its Veterans. Through virtual training, VA was able to keep this initiative on track – rolling rolled out first in Spokane, Washington in October 2020.

Her leadership guidance in innovation and modernization extends further as the agency has started to use health data that Veterans voluntarily give VA to study the genetics of cancer and develop treatments that only attack the cancer, not the patient — with researchers stating that VA's precision oncology program is the "future of cancer care." Embracing technological advances doesn't stop there. It includes modernizing VA's supply chain, the process Veterans use to appeal benefits decisions, the fiscal management system and the human resources department. Powers recognizes that these are the efforts that will give VA the resiliency needed to adapt and transform, giving Veterans the success, they have earned through their service to America.

2. Karen Brazell, principal executive director, Office of Acquisition, Logistics and Construction (OALC) and chief acquisition officer; acting assistant secretary, Office of Enterprise Integration (OEI), VA

Karen Brazell serves as the principal executive director for the OALC and chief acquisition officer as well as acting assistant secretary for OEI. In this dual role, Brazell provides oversight of VA's acquisition workforce of over 12,000 contracting, logistics and facility managers in addition to over 1,500 employees within OALC and OEI. Brazell promotes increased dialogue with industry partners and works to increase industry's awareness of VA needs, particularly as the department carried out its Fourth Mission of supporting the states in responding to the COVID -19 pandemic.

Since VA's initial response to the COVID-, Brazell has worked tirelessly with other women senior executives in VHA and OIT to ensure VA's clinicians have the supplies and equipment needed to maintain the provision of services to Veterans and in some cases, the American public.

Brazell continuously mentions in her communications to staff the importance of what they do and the impact on our nation's Veterans. Amidst VA's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic, she sponsored OALC's 2020 Women Veterans Service Project, which was a collaboration with the VA Community Resource and Referral Center

(CCRC) in Washington, D.C., to provide care packages to help women Veterans and children in need. May 18, her staff delivered a total of 77 care packages to the CRRC: 24 for women, 13 for teenage girls and 40 bags for youth-aged girls and boys.

Brazell has been a driving force for strategic partnering with the Department of Defense on the enterprise-wide adoption of the Defense Medical Logistics Standard Support application and the Defense Logistics Agency's Medical Surgical Prime Vendor program. These major strategic initiatives will modernize VA's supply chain and enable the department's contracting and logistician workforce to acquire products for the clinicians who care for our Veterans health and well-being in a more efficient process.

Additionally, in her other role as the acting assistant secretary for enterprise integration, she is the department's Integrator for the electronic health record modernization; supply chain and logistics modernization; financial management and business transformation. Brazell believes that program/project success relies on bringing all stakeholders to the table to provide solutions.

3. Michelle Gardner-Ince, director, Women Veteran-Owned Small Business Initiatives (WVOSBI), Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU), VA

Michelle Gardner-Ince is leading the way to make a concentrated effort improving Women-Owned Small Businesses (WOSB) participation and procurement opportunities through a new program that is the first of its kind in the federal government. As the first director of Women Veteran-Owned Small Business Initiatives (WVOSBI), under the OSDBU, she was tapped to lead and execute this major initiative for WOSB which focuses on women Veteran entrepreneurs in the federal and commercial marketplace.

Gardner-Ince has sponsored and championed five events for WOSB, collaborated with commercial firms, other federal agencies, education and non-profit entities to meet and discuss procurement opportunities with WOSB as well as engaged with the Small Business Administration to review policies and regulations for possible change that govern procurement opportunities for WOSB.

Under her direction and forward thinking, Gardner-Ince started the WVOSB Initiative with 30 female entrepreneurs — with an anticipation of growth to more than 100 participants by the end of calendar year 2020. The Initiative enables access, economic, procurement and learning opportunities through strategic efforts; offers chances to increase business sustainability and hosts events throughout the year which prepare female Veteran business owners to become procurement ready.

4. Stephanie Keith, director, cyber workforce management, OIT, VA

Stephanie Keith created a Cyber Training Academy that will equip VA's cyber workforce with skills applicable across the department and transferable to other agencies. Keith's vision centers the academy as a critical employee development tool that strengthens

the cyber workforce by imparting consistent, practicable skills to meet current and future cyber needs and she has developed and coordinated standards across the interagency.

Keith has always worked to instill a sense of confidence in everyone she works with to help them see themselves as valuable assets to any team. This involves bringing fresh ideas and new perspectives to the table. Combining new ideas with passion for their work and channeling those energies towards the mission, VA can achieve almost any goal.

5. Danielle Krakora, product manager, digital solutions, OIT, VA

Danielle Krakora guides, mentors and helps drive success within VA through her work as a health care innovator, strategist and organizational change agent. She is a proud U.S. Army Veteran dedicated to improving the lives of all Veterans through advocacy and community service. Her leadership vision is to be proactive when examining solutions that can improve care to Veterans. She leads by example by encouraging transparency and collaboration as the best ways to solve problems and uncover new solutions that improve care. She welcomes feedback from colleagues and works closely with other leaders to enhance the value of collaboration and experimentation.

As a U.S. Army combat medic, Krakora worked hand-in-hand with the teams caring for injured soldiers and this experience guides her work in VA today. She is constantly looking for ways to improve the care provided to Veterans by challenging her staff to think creatively when identifying ways to make Veterans' care better, quicker and more impactful. Her most recent achievement is leading the COVID-19 Makers Challenge to briskly build enhanced safety solutions to protect the nation's essential workers and help keep their families and patients safe.

In support of female IT innovators, Krakora hosts a monthly virtual thought leadership initiative she describes as a "Women in Federal IT" happy hour. Nearly 100 women leaders throughout the federal government and private industry meet online to share lessons learned, discuss challenges they face and reveal successes they've achieved. Information gleaned from these sessions is helping support IT best practices within the VA.

Krakora is a master in getting people interested and engaged in working together to find solutions to improve the lives of Veterans. In addition to her work for VA, she helps craft Veteran specific legislation and programming for the state of Ohio as a member of the Ohio Women Veterans Advisory Board. She further shares her passion for VA as a member of Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) speaking engagement team and is a featured speaker on VHA's podcast "Delivering more to come", which highlights VA's latest innovations that help Veterans.

6. The Honorable Cheryl L. Mason, chairman, Board of Veterans' Appeals, VA

Cheryl Mason's leadership at the Board of Veteran's Appeal (Board) has brought about real and impactful change to benefit Veterans. She led the Board through the passage and implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act (AMA). The AMA gives Veterans choice, clarity and control of their appeals and claims, and was the first major reform to the VA appeals system in 30 years. She recognized there was a gap in service regarding Board hearings and collaborated across the enterprise to leverage existing technologies to create virtual tele-hearings. In April, President Trump signed the Virtual Tele-Hearing Modernization Act making virtual tele-hearings a permanent option for Veterans. Mason is also a champion for military spouse hiring in the federal government and has helped bring together both public and private sector industry to share best practices for hiring and retaining military spouses.

Mason brings a unique perspective to VA as both a woman and military spouse. She fully understands the sacrifices Veterans and their families have made and ensures Board staff have opportunities to learn more about the Veteran/military experience. As an Ambassador for The President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide known as PREVENTS, she highlights suicide prevention training with specific sessions on PTSD and how-to tailor decisions for a Veteran or family member who may be grieving. This helps ensure that the decisions rendered by the Board are done so with a full understanding of how military service impacts a Veteran's daily life.

VA is in a constant state of modernization. Mason's leadership ensures Veterans will receive decisions that are both fair and easy to understand. Improvements in technology under her leadership, such as virtual tele-hearings, demonstrate VA is forward leaning and looking for ways to improve the Veteran experience at in the organization.

Mason's career has been dedicated to helping Veterans. She is a clear example women and women Veterans can lead change across large organizations like VA, to directly and positively impact the care and services Veterans receive. She brings her experience as a military spouse to all she does and has demonstrated despite career unknowns, changes in circumstances or transitions in or out of the military — there are people willing to assist and resources available to help women find their next move.

7. Kameron Matthews, M.D., JD, FAAFP, assistant under secretary for Health for Clinical Services, Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

Kameron Matthews is the chief medical officer for the largest integrated health system in the U.S., providing care to more than 9 million enrolled Veterans 1,243 health care facilities, including 172 VA Medical Centers and 1,062 outpatient sites of care of varying complexity (VHA outpatient clinics). Matthews formerly served as the AUSH for Community Care where she was responsible for the community-based provider network

that expanded Veteran access to care. She joined VA in 2016 after multiple leadership roles in Chicago, Illinois in correctional medicine, federally qualified health centers and managed care.

Throughout her career, she served in several roles to drive the medical industry in meaningful ways. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the National Quality Forum, a member of the advisory board of National Minority Quality Forum and a member of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. She serves as the 2018-2020 National Academy of Medicine James C. Puffer/American Board of Family Medicine fellow.

Matthews is a board-certified family physician, advocate and policy maker with a career focused on underserved patient populations. Taking a leadership role over VA's Community Care program and now Clinical Services, she makes a difference in the lives of Veterans through providing high-quality health care. In her current role, she impacts and advocates for quality, accessible and equitable Veteran-centered care.

Women Veterans are the fastest growing Veteran population. The total number of women Veterans using VA health care has increased by 22% in the last four years from just over 423,000 women Veterans in 2014 to more than 500,000 in 2019. Matthews is committed to addressing the health care needs of women Veterans and working to ensure that timely, equitable, quality and comprehensive health care services are provided in a sensitive and safe environment at VA health facilities nationwide. This approach ultimately aims to provide preventative and clinical care using state-of-the-art technology equal to that provided to male Veterans.

Throughout Matthew's career, she has demonstrated a commitment and pride to the mission of serving others and advancing access to quality health care to underserved populations, including Women Veterans. Matthews says as a physician, she is proud to have joined a health system like VA that has a mission of service.

8. [Barbara C. Morton](#), deputy chief Veterans experience officer, Veterans Experience Office, VA

Barbara Morton is an enthusiastic mentor of many VA employees and public servants across government. Mentorship for her is a privilege and a duty which honors her mentors, whose shoulders she stands on. She is a true champion of public service and of the movement of driving government to provide the best experiences to those it has the honor of serving.

Morton is grateful and humbled to be able to provide a strong voice for customer experience in government and the Veterans experience at VA, weaving this capability into the department as a core business discipline. She is a passionate public servant who has devoted herself to public service and creating a positive impact for Veterans and their families through understanding their experiences and translating what they need into action and positive impact.

Focusing on customer experience, VA is able to understand the journey of all Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors, and understand their unique or specialized needs and experiences when interacting with VA, in person, by phone or online. VA has built a capability through the Veterans Experience Office to translate those insights into tangible tools and products to empower employees at all levels to deliver the best experiences possible.

Morton enjoys serving alongside her brothers and sisters in public service — it is a calling to her, not a job, and the mission to provide the best experiences to Veterans and the public at large never ends. Her contribution is to elevate and give a voice to the experiences of Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors and help that focus endure as a core part of how VA does business.

9. Susan O'Hare, senior technical advisor, OIT, VA

Susan O'Hare is a customer-focused leader, passionate about improving the experience of both internal and external IT users to ultimately benefit Veterans. She is persistent and fearlessly dives in to find the answer to complex questions and challenges while at the same time ensuring subject matter experts closest to the situation have full latitude to execute their solution. O'Hare appreciates the unique expertise that each team member brings to a project and empowers her colleagues — at all levels — to be proactive.

With almost 40 years of government IT experience, she helped establish goals, rapidly prioritize user stories based on key stakeholder input and identify objective milestones to help focus team member efforts. She used development, security and operations (DevSecOps), an agile principle to unite diverse virtual members into a cohesive, high-functioning team of teams with a unified purpose. O'Hare then guided this team of teams, rapidly built velocity and delivered record telehealth achievements in seven workstreams.

O'Hare and other women leaders at VA ensure value to the Veteran comes first. As a result of her strong leadership, OIT adapted and enhanced VA's telehealth video conferencing system, VA Video Connect, to stay ahead of an unprecedented 1,700% increase in Veteran telehealth demand. She also helped VHA deliver on an eight-year vision for tele-critical care (formerly called tele-ICU) in just four months. O'Hare's and her team's hard work ensured Veterans continue to receive high quality care, whenever and wherever they need it — especially during this challenging time.

O'Hare is a leader at VA that conducts research to identify and address the unique needs of women Veterans and leverages "journey mapping" — creating a visualization of the Veteran experiences across interactions with various facets of VA. In addition to amplifying the existing relevant programs and resources tailored specifically to women Veterans, O'Hare works to continue to enhance and evolve health care programs, benefits and other services and resources available through VA.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, O'Hare stepped up to lead the COVID telehealth improvement initiative effort with a servant leader attitude that quickly cemented key working relationships across organizational boundaries — focusing on a common objective instead of cultural differences. Always keeping her compass firmly pointed at customer priorities, O'Hare provided continual course correction for the team while maintaining constancy of purpose and stability so teams could continue to move forward under full sail. She escalated issues, broke barriers, and collaborated with an ever-widening circle of contributors to ensure a 360-degree solution.

O'Hare did not stop with a short-term issue resolution but kept pressure on the team to drive all the way through to the root cause so lingering problems would not be left for later efforts to solve. This resulted in dramatically expanded delivery of the best possible telehealth experience for Veterans and VA business partners, especially VHA and its Office of Connected Care. O'Hare has proven regardless of the circumstances, a cross-functional DevSecOps team of teams can accomplish great things through commitment to a Customer-focused vision, constant collaboration and determined resourcefulness.

10. Lynette Sherill, executive director, enterprise command operations, OIT, VA

Lynette Sherill is an example of when women have the power to change the world, they do so time and time again. Looking back on the legacy of women throughout history encourages her to move forward and not repeat or copy someone else. In every role — whether it be a leader, worker, friend, wife, or mom — she is affirmation that women influence and lead change that shapes the world to be a better place. Sherill uses her voice to encourage young women in the workplace making time for them and modeling for young women what was offered to her. She supports training, offers advice and encourage them to think of things in a bigger picture.

As a woman in a high-level IT position, Sherill is among those changing Veteran lives through strategic and innovative ideas that transform the way VA delivers IT services directly to the Veteran.

Sherrill wants women to realize the power they have is in who they are - not who society wants them to be and that women were created to change the world and that they will embrace the power they have and use it to do just that.

11. Kim Sullins, operations lead, IT strategic communication, Office of Information and Technology (OIT), VA

Kimiko "Kim" Sullins, leads strategic (long-term) and daily communication for more than 16,000 IT workers and division directors at VA. Her insightful direction to enterprise Communicators during regular centered on providing VA's priority IT and Digital Modernization project clear, high-impact guidance, resulting in successful service-delivery to the 12 million Veterans and family members who depend on VA for health

care and benefits. During COVID-19 Sullins' focus and dedication to timely, clear strategic communication to IT service personnel resulted in seamless transition of more than 300,000 VA workers and contractors to remote telework status.

Sullins routinely models professional and ethical conduct and mentors women colleagues to aid their ability to perform at an optimal level. She drives consistently high levels of quality-control assurance and provides guidance through careful intake of worker feedback, business-partner needs assessments and development of OIT communication products and services that keep IT personnel and Veterans informed. Her laser-focus and dedication during COVID-19 mobilization at VA ensured the timely execution of a critical increase in telehealth capacity at VA Medical Centers.

Sullins' unique blend of communication acumen, management expertise and relationship-building are instrumental in enabling OIT personnel to provide exceptional customer service and focus on delivering dramatic impact through VA's Digital Transformation.

Sullins consistently meets with her staff and colleagues across the VA enterprise and is thoughtful and intentional about intaking information impacting their work. She collaborates to develop solutions that will eliminate barriers to success and increase seamless service-delivery. Sullins thinks creatively and provides guidance designed to benefit workers' ability to meet VA's important mission — delivering quality, dependable service to America's Veterans and their families via seamless IT data systems, digital platforms and mobile applications.

12. Stephanie Taylor, director of IT program integration, OIT, VA

Stephanie Taylor excels at collaborating with direct reports and supervisors to develop seamless project execution that ensures timely delivery of services and benefits to Veterans.

Taylor regularly consults with division leaders to marshal enterprise-wide IT resources necessary to conduct quality-control exercises. Taylor is dedicated to identifying areas of success and areas in need of additional resources, ensuring VA business divisions can continually deliver exceptional service to Veterans and their families through IT applications and systems.

During VA-OIT's COVID-19 mobilization, Taylor successfully oversaw daily reporting on IT capabilities to the agency head. Taylor also managed IT-specific planning, collection and delivery of VA daily COVID-19 updates to the White House.

Under Taylor's careful guidance, women colleagues at VA led several teams that were critical to continuity of operations plans during COVID-19 mobilization, including keeping IT services available, particularly in rural areas and developing plans to re-open IT facilities that directly serve Veterans and their families.

13. Cherri Waters, director, service quality and support (EUO), IT Operations and Services, OIT, VA

As a leader, Cherri Waters seeks to connect with people and works to build relationships which can be keys to success. These relationships happen at all levels of the organization and it is through this wide-spanning view where she looks for others to find the best in everyone, because as individuals build, the strength of the whole team builds. Waters has a firm belief that people around her reflect the attitude of leaders around them. Making a conscious choice to be positive and confident she builds a culture focused on finding solutions to problems and is willing to take risks to succeed.

Waters approaches projects with a “nothing is impossible” attitude and gives team members a safe space to grow. Waters also believes key component to mentoring and leadership is to be a lifelong learner. She encourages being well-read in a variety of subjects and in-touch with current events. All these tools help when building connections across the organization and ultimately enhance her ability to serve as a leader and mentor those around her.

At the onset of COVID-19 in the U.S. Waters understood the need to maintain VA’s existing bandwidth for remote telework. She also recognized the importance of expanding it and provided additional equipment to those serving Veterans, their families and their caregivers. She is leading the effort to continue getting the necessary equipment out to help clinicians connect with patients — no matter their location—and continue to deliver high-quality care.

Waters works around the clock to ensure OIT provides the necessary equipment for telework and telehealth distribution and works with vendors to continue distributing the equipment weekly. Though it’s been several months since transitioning to a remote work environment, Waters and her team are coordinating with VHA facilities to find creative ways to stage equipment coming in so OIT is always prepared to support our nation’s Veterans.

Waters genuinely believes by conquering the impossible tasks and rallying others to achieve goals, she demonstrates how women can serve in senior leadership roles in VA. She is an expert leader in her field and provides dedicated service to Veterans and their families. As a woman and a leader, she is a role model demonstrating opportunities for women VA personnel, giving them a vision of where their career with VA could lead. This service by example and welcoming environment is invaluable in a traditionally male-dominated career path.