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News Release

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VA recognizes 2020 Robert L. Jesse Award winner for innovative steps in expanding telehealth access for Veterans

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today the recipient of the agency’s Robert L. Jesse Award for Excellence in Innovation — for advanced work in expanding [telehealth](#) access for Veterans living in rural communities across the country.

Dr. Leonie Heyworth, M.D., MPH, director of Synchronous Telehealth, VA Telehealth Services and primary care provider at the VA San Diego Healthcare System, was presented the award during VA’s virtual [Innovation Experience \(iEX\)](#) event for her work in helping develop, implement and spur clinical adoption of real-time telehealth solutions for Veterans, such as the [ATLAS \(Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations\)](#) program and [VA Video Connect \(VVC\)](#).

“VA is continuously improving its systems to enhance Veteran’s health outcomes no matter their location, and achievements such as this are indicative of the work our employees are doing to accomplish this task,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Dr. Heyworth’s eagerness to innovate, collaborate and lead — all while keeping Veterans at the center — made her a natural selection for the Robert L. Jesse Award. Her efforts played an integral role in VA safely caring for Veterans during the pandemic through virtual visits.”

The two award runners-up were Melissa Oliver, program manager for [Assistive Technology and Rehabilitation](#) at the Richmond VA Medical Center, for her work in expanding 3D printing capabilities across the country, and [Rory Cooper, Ph.D.](#), director of VA Pittsburg Healthcare System Human Engineering Research Laboratories, for his leadership and inventions, like a joystick used in virtually every electric-powered wheelchair in the world.

The winner and finalists were selected by a committee composed of leadership from across the Veterans Health Administration. The committee selected participants on a variety of criteria, including vision, community involvement/service, interpersonal effectiveness and Veteran-centric outcomes.

Learn more about [VA innovations](#).

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