

Office of Community Engagement 2018 VHA COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGE

Special Edition Newsletter



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About Us



The mission of the Office of Community Engagement (OCE) is to serve as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community level and as a facilitator/access point for public and private entities interested in partnering with VHA to benefit Veterans, their families, caregivers, and Survivors.

2018 VHA Community Partnership Challenge Winners Show the Return on Partnership

A mobile food pantry, suicide prevention initiative, and a partnership that provides household furnishings for homeless Veterans received this year's Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Community Partnership Challenge award. The annual contest recognizes successful nonmonetary partnerships between VHA facilities and nongovernmental organizations.



Former VHA Executive in Charge, Dr. Carolyn Clancy

Former VHA Executive in Charge, Dr. Carolyn Clancy, recognized winners in a virtual ceremony on May 29, 2018, where she showcased the great work being done by VA facilities to fill gaps in services and provide value to Veterans and their families in their home communities.

“These winners successfully demonstrated the ‘Return on Partnership’ contest theme by increasing services available to Veterans and advancing VA’s mission on their behalf,” said Dr. Clancy. “These are stand-out examples of the many partnerships between VHA and community organizations that serve as force multipliers by improving outcomes for Veterans around the country.”

Selected from a record 109-plus high-quality submissions, these three VA facilities took home top honors: [Central Texas Veterans Health Care System](#), [Phoenix VA Health Care System](#), and [VA San Diego Healthcare System](#).

Collectively they distributed 72,000 meals to Veterans, connected 1,467 Veterans in crisis with support services, and helped 5,000 Veterans make their new house a home.

“The contest is a fantastic platform to showcase amazing collaborations and inspire more,” said Lelia Jackson, OCE’s Director. “We hope this year’s winners encourage more VA facilities to form and replicate community partnerships to benefit Veterans and their families.”

Winning entries provided clear evidence that their partnership contributed to these VA strategic priorities:

- Providing greater choice for Veterans
- Modernizing VA systems
- Focusing resources more efficiently
- Improving timeliness of services
- Preventing Veterans’ suicide

Other worthy submissions described partnerships that are promoting Veterans’ engagement in the arts, education, and exercise; expanding access to employment, health care, and housing; and improving mental health, nutrition, and wellness.

“If you want to travel fast, travel by yourself,” Clancy said. “If you want to travel far, you go with others.”



A Veteran receiving food at a Joining Hands, Feeding Veterans mobile pantry

Partnership Allows for Multifaceted Support to Combat Food Insecurity among Veterans and their Families

Food insecurity affects millions of Americans nationwide, including Veterans. Estimates are that 1.5 million Veterans nationwide reside in homes that rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Many of those Veterans are in Texas, where roughly 100,000 Veterans participate in SNAP (formerly known as food stamps).

“Even though I receive foods stamps, it is not enough to make it through the month,” said one Texas Veteran. “I am glad for programs like yours that help me out.”

The [Central Texas Veterans Health Care System](#) (CTVHCS) partnered with the [Central Texas Food Bank](#) (CTFB) in August 2017. Since then, the partners have provided food to 400 Veteran households in Austin and Temple. This mobile food pantry partnership has delivered 72,000 meals in less than a year, earning its selection as one of three 2018 VHA Community Partnership Challenge winners.

The “Joining Hands, Feeding Veterans” partnership works by bringing together food suppliers and financial donors in CTFB’s statewide network of 300 partner agencies. As mobile pantries distribute fresh produce, meats, dairy, and nonperishable goods to Veterans at the Austin and Temple VA facilities each month, Veterans can meet with registered dietitians, social workers, and employment counselors and get screened for ongoing food insecurity issues.

This efficient, targeted service delivery method caught the attention of VHA Community Partnership Challenge judges.

“The program meets the Veterans, where they are, at a place familiar and convenient for them, which increases the long-term success of the program,” one judge said in selecting CTVHCS as an award finalist. “This innovative way of delivering services to Veterans, leaving no waste, at no cost to VA, while bringing along your own mobile infrastructure, is a great model to build a modernized, service-delivery system at VA sites all over the country.”

CTVHCS plans to co-locate and expand resources at future mobile pantry events, including social workers trained in suicide prevention, integrated case management, and homeless services.

LEARN MORE

Contact the [Central Texas Veterans Health Care System](#).

Read about the [Central Texas Food Bank](#).

Be Connected's Web of Community Support Assists Arizona Veterans

“Be Connected,” a statewide partnership between the [Phoenix VA Health Care System](#) and [Arizona Coalition for Military Families](#), is another winner of the 2018 VHA Community Partnership Challenge.



Be Connected is comprised of three components — Call, Match, and Learn — designed to reduce Arizona Veteran deaths by suicide by enhancing the community response to Veterans in need. The Be Connected Call program provides 24/7 access to a support line. The Match program links Veterans and families to suicide prevention and other resources. The Learn program trains VA and community providers such as first responders and legal and court professionals to strengthen networks of care, support, and services.

The collaboration takes a “no wrong door” approach to reducing Veteran deaths by suicide in Arizona, where the risk is three times higher than the national average. In addressing VHA’s highest clinical priority, the program stresses system connectivity — building the public and private capacity statewide to end suicide through prevention, education, outreach, intervention, and coordination.

From the launch of Be Connected in mid-April 2017 to February 2018, nearly 1,500 individuals called the support line. In addition, organizers mapped 1,000 resources in 200 categories on an online platform and through a mobile resource navigator. For the past five years, the partnership has also trained and equipped 3,300 community members to become Military/Veteran Resource Navigators. Three full-time Be Connected navigators are also available in northern, central, and southern Arizona.

“Be Connected did what no one else has,” said one Vietnam Veteran, “you gave me hope.” The partnership plans to continue refining outreach across the state through surveys and an annual symposium that convenes more than 500 stakeholders from military, government, and the community to network and exchange best practice information.

LEARN MORE

Contact the [Phoenix VA Health Care System](#).

Call the 24/7 Be Connected support line at 1-866-4AZ-VETS (1-866-429-8387).

Visit www.BeConnectedAZ.org.





Team AMVETS volunteers

Collaboration Welcomes Homeless Veterans Home

A partnership between [VA San Diego Healthcare System](#) and [Team AMVETS Department of California Service Foundation](#) that is making sure newly housed Veterans can make their house a home is one of the three 2018 VHA Community Partnership Challenge winners.

VA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are providing eligible Veterans who are homeless with vouchers that support permanent housing. Unfortunately, these available homes are often unfurnished.

“Imagine being homeless and then being given the opportunity to get off the streets, only to realize that although you have a roof and walls, you still don’t have the basic household necessities such as beds, sofas, and dishes or other household supplies,” said Donna M. Fischer, Director of VA Voluntary Service, in the submission.

Filling this critical gap is VA San Diego’s partnership with the Team AMVETS Welcome Home program. Launched in November 2012, the partnership provides HUD-VA Supportive Housing voucher recipients with furniture, appliances, and other household items so they can cook, relax, and enjoy the basic comforts of home. The program serves 15 to 20 Veterans a week, and has assisted a total of 4,010 California Veterans since 2012.

Through Welcome Home, Team AMVETS collects and delivers a myriad of items to newly housed Veterans, including beds, sheets, pillows, and blankets; bedroom, living room, and dining room furniture; pots and pans; towels and rugs; and appliances.

“The transformation from an empty apartment to a furnished home makes a great impact and difference to the Veterans,” the partners say. “They feel more at ease and comfortable in their new units.”

The partnership is yielding other benefits as well. Some Veterans assisted by the program have volunteered at the Team AMVETS warehouse to clean furniture for other Veterans preparing to move into new homes. Other Veterans have been hired to work at AMVETS thrift stores. In some cases, Veterans have won custody of their children by showing case managers and judges their furnished homes.

LEARN MORE

Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless can call or visit their local VA Medical Center or Community Resource and Referral Center where VA staff are ready to help.

Contact the VA [San Diego Healthcare System](#).

Read about [Team AMVETS](#).

VHA Recognizes Partnerships that Support Veterans

VHA selected [three official winners](#) of the 2018 VHA Community Partnership Challenge. There were well over 100 submissions and many stood out for their efforts to improve the lives of Veterans and their families. Here are a few examples:



Diverting Veterans from the Criminal Justice System

The [Charles George VA Medical Center](#) in Asheville, North Carolina, is partnering with the 28th Judicial District to create and sustain the [Buncombe County Veterans Treatment Court](#) (VTC), which diverts nonviolent Veterans away from the criminal justice system into treatment. The partnership combines VA clinical services with court-imposed accountability to keep Veterans identified as “high risk/high need” on track to recovery. It currently serves 18 Veterans but is positioned to serve up to 30.

“The VTC helped me get my life back together,” said one VTC graduate. “Going to therapy at the VA, I learned how my Service injuries still impact my life. But now I have the tools to make better decisions. I was at the end of the road ... and had even tried suicide. But now ... (I) have goals that don’t involve getting high every day.”



Providing HIV and HCV Testing

The [VA North Texas Health Care System](#)’s partnership with [Prism Health North Texas](#) is connecting Veterans living with HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C virus (HCV) to preventive services, health care, point-of-care counseling, and rapid testing.

Prism fills a key gap by attending Dallas Stand Downs for homeless Veterans and providing HCV point-of-care testing, a service not available at the Dallas VA. With testing results available in 20 minutes, the partnership decreases the number of people unaware of their HCV status. The partnership has tested 104 Veterans for HCV since 2014. The partnership also used rapid HIV testing to test and counsel 467 Veterans at Stand Downs.

“I was afraid to get tested, but with your encouragement, I got tested,” one participant said. “My test came back negative. I am so relieved! Now I can concentrate on getting housing.”



Supporting Medical-Legal Partnerships

The [Bay Pines VA Healthcare System](#) in Tampa, Florida, collaborates with [Stetson University Veterans Law Institute](#) and [Bay Area Legal Services](#) to address a persistent need among Veterans for civil legal services to resolve bankruptcies and custody issues, obtain financial benefits and clear up other noncriminal issues.

The Bay Pines VA Healthcare System Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) connects attorneys to eligible Veterans in need. This is one of 25 VA MLPs, which take a patient-centered approach to care by integrating legal services into the network of VA health care services provided to Veterans. Veterans can walk in or make an appointment to see an attorney at the area’s main VA facility, C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center.

Since the collaboration was established in February 2017, MLP has provided more than 600 Veterans with legal assistance. In one case, the partnership helped a Veteran who was homeless expedite his pension application and obtain \$1,100 in monthly benefits. “Civil legal problems

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— from evictions and family law issues to something as simple as the need for proper identification — are often the greatest obstacles to a Veteran’s health, housing, economic stability, and overall outcomes,” said Jason W. Dangel, public affairs officer, in the submission. He said the Bay Pines MLP program “is a shining example of a community partnership designed to address nonmedical barriers to care and social determinants of health to foster positive health outcomes for Veterans.”



Preventing Suicide Through Training

[Louisville VA Medical Center’s](#) Suicide Prevention Program’s partnership with the [Kentucky Division of Behavioral Health](#) gets notice for its multifaceted collaboration to serve more than 330,000 Veterans in Kentucky through increased awareness of mental health and suicide prevention issues and services.

Among the partnership’s many successes in more than five years of work is the training of 5,500 VA and community providers in a six-hour program called “Assessing and Managing Suicide Risk.” According to the [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#), this research-based program is designed improve the skills of behavioral health professionals in caring for patients at risk of death by suicide.

The partnership also helps organize annual VA Mental Health Summits attended by Veterans and family caregivers, state public schools, police

departments, courts, universities, and social service entities. In addition, the team collaborated with the state Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families (SMVF) Behavioral Health Initiative to provide suicide-specific [immersion](#) training and resource education to nearly 360 participants since 2012.



Supporting College Student Veterans

A partnership among [Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital](#) in Bedford and Massachusetts’s community colleges and universities is highlighted for improving student Veterans’ attendance at and completion of postsecondary education.

Started in 2011, the Veteran Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program now involves 10 active partnerships with state higher education agencies and informal work with other schools. The partnership provides college and university faculty and staff with regular briefings and [tools](#) on what Veterans need to succeed in school, including academic case management, mental health counseling, and medical care. VITAL also enrolls student Veterans in VA care.

The contest entry highlights how VITAL helped one Veteran, a Marine who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, overcome academic struggles and graduate with a master’s degree. After a two-year battle with anxiety and other issues that threatened to derail his academic career, the Veteran

found an on-campus Veterans Center, explained his difficulties and got connected with services through the VA VITAL team.

“Thanks to the VITAL team support,” the partnership submitter says, “the Veteran’s grades improved and he graduated in the spring of 2016 with honors.”



Honoring Female Veteran and Military Moms

The Women Warriors Baby Shower, a partnership between the [VA St. Louis Health Care System](#) and the [Eastern Missouri American Red Cross](#), honors Veterans and members of the military or their spouses by “showering” new or expecting mothers with diapers, car seats, and other baby items to prepare for motherhood.

In-kind donations to shower participants last year totaled \$130,194, and organizers report growing interest from expecting Veterans and military moms. The first event in 2015 attracted 25 Veterans, 2016’s event drew 70 women, and 2017’s event grew to 100 women.

An expecting female Veteran who recently settled in the area said she was particularly grateful for the events. “I do not have any family here,” she said, “so this is the only baby shower anyone has given me.”



Raising Awareness About Veterans' Issues

The [William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital](#) and [Journey Mental Health Center](#) are working together to strengthen clinical, staff, and community support for Veterans in Madison, Wisconsin.

The partnership created an eight-part educational series to promote a strength-based approach to serving Veterans who are homeless, at risk of death by suicide, in need of drug use or mental health treatment, exposed to Military Sexual Trauma, or experiencing other issues. So far, 225 participants from 23 community agencies took part in the series, which aims to make sure Veterans' care in the community is culturally sensitive, of high quality, and capable of meeting Veterans' diverse needs.



Expanding Care Choices for Veterans

A partnership between the [VA New York Harbor Health Care System](#) (VANYHHS) and [Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at New York University Langone Medical Center](#) is expanding choices for Veterans and families in need of mental health or family counseling services.

Veterans and their loved ones who require short-term mental health

or family therapy are referred to a Medical Family Clinic (MFC). In turn, MFC connects Veterans to VANYHHS for first time or continued care. Since 2012, VA has referred more than 700 Veterans and family members to the clinic, which has a high rate of customer satisfaction.

"I have made great strides in my personal growth due to my time here," said one Veteran served by the clinic. "It is so difficult to find the right provider but the clinic made it easy."



Caring for the Whole Veteran

[VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System](#) has teamed up with [Peak Military Care Network \(PMCN\)](#) to address the holistic needs of Veterans and families in the Pikes Peak area of Colorado Springs by creating an expanded network of services.

PMCN assesses and convenes community providers, VA, and military installation resources to provide more services to Veterans. Services include behavioral health, caregiver support, child and family services, crisis intervention, first response for domestic and family violence, early care, K-12 and higher education, employment/workforce readiness, financial and benefits assistance, housing assistance, medical/physical health, and social services.

In 2017, the partnership network of more than 40 community agencies had referred 1,600 individuals to services

and provided direct assistance to 1,200 to Service members, Veterans, and families. The partners meet monthly for training and to network.



Helping Veterans Who are Homeless Become Work Ready

Veterans who are homeless in southern Oregon are getting ready to work through a seven-year-long collaboration between [VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics](#) and [Easter Seals Oregon](#), which is the local administrator of the U.S. Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program.

Easter Seals augments and enhances the services offered by VA by maintaining weekly walk-in hours at the VA vocational rehabilitation program. Veterans can get access to job readiness services, job club, and workshop job search assistance and follow-along employment services such as job-related equipment and clothing, assistance with transportation expenses, training and remedial education, and assistance with trade certification and licensing expenses.

Veterans served by Easter Seals have received help in moving from temporary to permanent employment status, obtaining commercial driver's licenses, earning job experience through transitional work assignments, and completing resumes. During July, August, and September of 2017, 72 percent of the Veterans deemed "work ready" were successfully placed in employment.



Expanding Services to Formerly Homeless LA Veterans

The [VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System \(VAGLAHS\)](#) Veteran Services and Activities Council is a strategic partnership that is extending the reach of services available to Veterans who are homeless beyond what VA is authorized to provide.

The Services Council started in June 2017, when Building 209 on the West LA Campus become home to 54 once-homeless Veterans. The Services



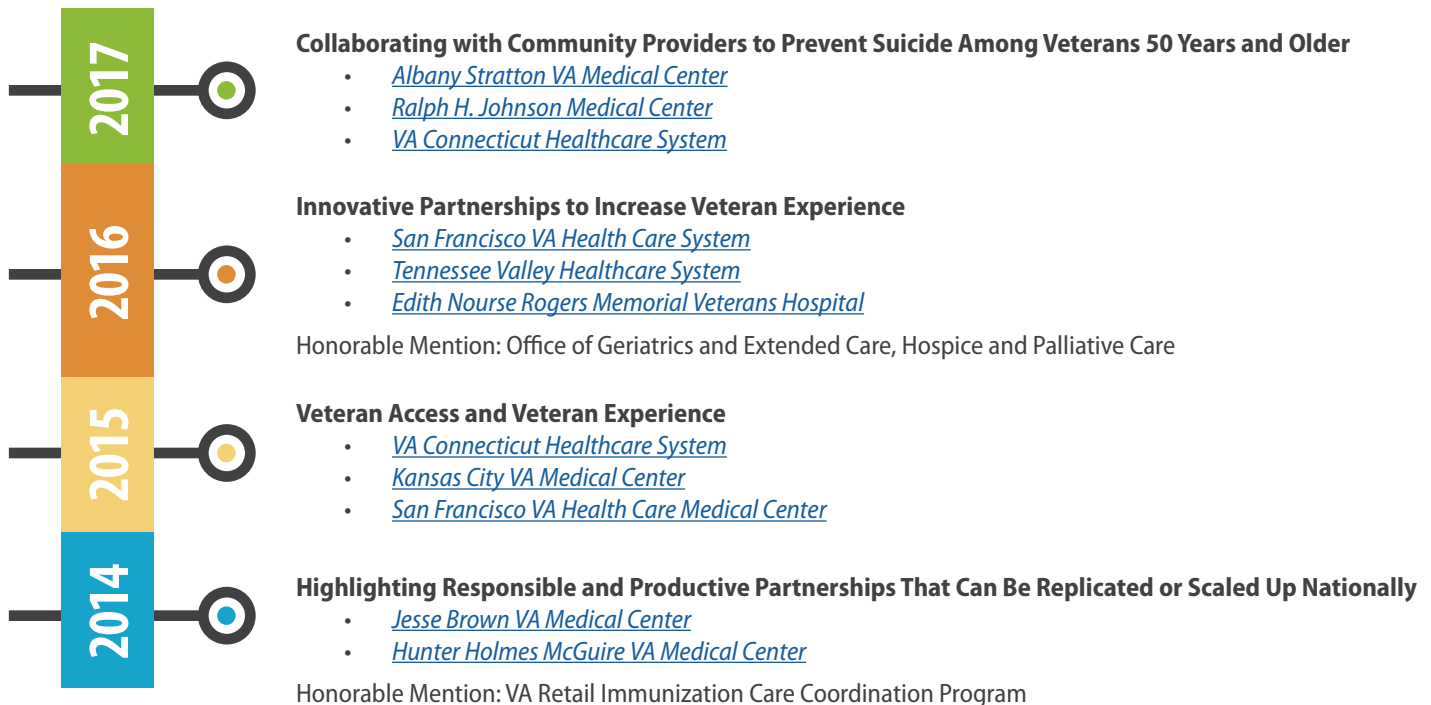
Council helped new residents settle in by hosting a Welcome Home lunch; providing blenders, coffee makers, artwork, and other items for the new homes; and assisting Veterans on move-in day with unpacking boxes, making beds, and stocking supplies.

All told, the Services Council in 2017 logged 17,513 volunteer hours

assisting 16,443 LA Veterans who live on the VA GLA campus or participate in VA's homeless programs. That year the council also served 327,456 meals, handed out 128 Metro passes, provided 2,500 articles of clothing, and helped house 185 Veterans who were homeless.

A History of Support to Veterans: Previous Community Partnership Challenge Themes and Winners

The [2018 VHA Community Partnership Challenge](#) winners join a long list of previous winners, which were chosen for their extraordinary efforts in meeting past contest themes. Here are the themes and winners from previous years:



COMING UP

in the Summer 2018 Edition from OCE...

New Partnership Alerts: Choose Home and the Substance Use Disorder Pilot Project.

Want to partner with VA? Email us at CommunityEngagement@va.gov.

Visit our website at <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/oceabout.asp>.

VA



U.S. Department
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