

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT QUARTERLY



The Quarterly Newsletter of the Office of Community Engagement & Center for Compassionate Care Innovation

ABOUT US

Office of Community Engagement

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 to be a facilitator/access point for public and private entities interested in partnering with VHA to benefit Veterans, their families, caregivers, and Survivors.

Center for Compassionate Care Innovation

The mission of the Center for Compassionate Care Innovation (CCI) is to explore emerging therapies that are safe and ethical to enhance Veteran physical and mental well-being when other treatments have not been successful. CCI primarily focuses on treatments that address the following health concerns: posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury, chronic pain, and suicidality.

OCE FEATURE STORY

NEW PARTNERSHIP AIMS TO ENHANCE VETERANS' EMERGENCY ROOM CARE AND RESOURCES

A new OCE-facilitated partnership aims to sensitively train emergency room medical and clinical staff on the specialized concerns of Veterans who seek care in community settings.

For example, when a Veteran goes to his or her local emergency room (ER), a minor injury from a car accident may trigger flashbacks, severe anxiety or other symptoms of posttraumatic stress

disorder (PTSD). ER staff trained to be sensitive to the medical and mental health needs of Veterans would be aware of this potential, could address it with the Veteran directly, and arrange for additional PTSD care.

The August 2018 memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the [American College of Emergency Physicians](#) (ACEP) and Veterans Health Administration

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(VHA) is designed to educate emergency medicine clinicians about the availability of VA benefits and resources, including the [Veterans Crisis Line](#), and about Veteran-specific conditions and care needs.

Heather Luper, MSW, LCSW-C, Clinical Social Worker, said the partnership aims to expand access to care in several ways:

- *Educate ER providers on how to share information with Veterans on their potential eligibility for VA benefits related to emergency care.*
- *Train ER providers on enhancing screening to address Veteran-specific medical and mental health conditions.*
- *Expand opportunities for ACEP member providers such as physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners to receive training on Veterans' care issues, including environmental exposures, traumatic brain injury, and posttraumatic stress disorder.*

ACEP also pledged to work with VHA to enhance recruitment efforts for emergency medical professionals who seek employment at VA medical facilities and to participate in a VHA awareness campaign during September's Suicide Prevention Awareness Month by disseminating VA suicide prevention resources and information to ACEP membership.

LEARN MORE

- Direct further questions to heather.luper@va.gov at OCE and to ngavin@acep.org.

COLLABORATING TO HELP VETERANS "CHOOSE HOME"

Veterans who are aging or have complex health conditions often have challenges getting to health care appointments, shopping and preparing meals, driving or navigating public transport, and engaging in other activities of daily living. Whether these challenges are because of a traumatic brain injury, limb loss, advanced dementia, or hearing impairment, Veterans who feel they cannot independently navigate the world may consider moving to a nursing home, even if they'd rather stay at home.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is working to help change that. Choose Home is an initiative aimed at ensuring that Veterans, their families, caregivers, and Survivors have access to the comprehensive, integrated, personalized care they need to get care at home and in their community. Choose Home is spearheaded by the Veterans Experience Office under the leadership of Chief Officer Dr. Lynda Davis.

This initiative is timely because the demand for in-home care is rising. The number of Veterans over age 65 accessing geriatric and palliative care has increased by 20 percent over the last five years, according to VA. In addition, a 2017 [study](#) of about 300 Veterans with a history of traumatic brain injury who were discharged from VA's polytrauma rehabilitation centers found that about one-third required ongoing support. Additionally, data shows that Veterans who require assistance with activities of daily living secondary to their disabilities and illnesses are seeking out options to stay in their home and access services in their local communities. More and more geriatric Veterans and Veterans diagnosed with severe disabilities are seeking options to age in their homes and communities, according to VA data.

Choose Home is focused on improving care within VA and strengthening connections with community organizations that can help provide the services and care that are unavailable at VA. OCE is using its expertise integrating strategic partnerships into VA care to lead the part of the initiative aimed at creating strong and

effective partnerships between local VA facilities and organizations serving Veterans in their communities. Over five weeks in the summer, members of the Choose Home team traveled to three Veteran-friendly communities — Pittsburgh, Las Vegas, and Colorado Springs — to meet with local VA and community leaders to learn about the ongoing efforts to support Veterans and their families and identify opportunities for greater collaboration.



Creating the Choose Home Model

To ensure that Veterans can access comprehensive, integrated, personalized care alternatives to placements in nursing homes or other costly institutions, the Choose Home initiative is working toward the following goals:

- *Create a personal, comprehensive Choose Home plan to integrate clinical and other types of services and benefits into a single, comprehensive, and coordinated plan.*
- *Strengthen community partnerships and navigation by engaging Veteran- and caregiver-friendly communities, leading national and community-based stakeholders in delivering comprehensive services, and improving community networks to allow Veterans to easily access services and programs inside and outside VA.*
- *Establish a Center of Excellence for Caregiver Research, which will identify and disseminate research, innovations, and best practices to improve access to personal, comprehensive, high-quality care, benefits, and services for Veterans, families, caregivers, and Survivors who Choose Home.*

Moving Forward

“It is important for Veterans and their caregivers to be able to identify and access services in the community that will complement VA services,” said Lelia Jackson, Director of OCE, about the Choose Home initiative. “We are committed to taking the information we garnered in Colorado Springs and other Choose Home communities to better understand what is working well and areas of improvement in services needed by the Choose Home population.”

VA is now identifying pilot sites throughout the country that can work locally to streamline referrals to a Choose Home Assessment and Care Planning Team at the local VA facility, which can then assess aging and clinically complex Veterans, match them to appropriate VA and community services, and help them Choose Home.

REMEMBER IN NOVEMBER



President Donald J. Trump established November as Veterans and Military Families Month in 2017.

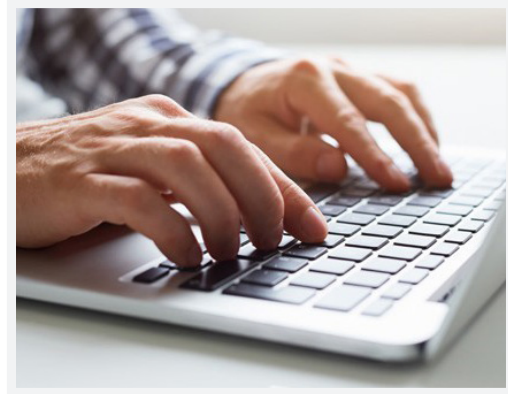
Nationwide actions, services, and honors to commemorate Veterans and Military Families Month

Veterans and Military Families Month is a month-long recognition of the sacrifices of the nation's Veterans and their Survivors and of the support they receive from their families.

Last year was the first time the Veterans Day observance was expanded to the full month of November. During the month, the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA) will publish stories and highlight events that demonstrate how VA and other Veterans' organizations across the country are serving Veterans and the military community. Some of these actions include legal services for Veterans, Whole Health initiatives, special town halls, and VetTalkX, where Veterans share their personal experiences. There will be special services on November 11, the traditional observance of Veterans Day.

HELP SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT THE VETERANS HUB AND IMPROVE VETERANS' HEALTH

Community partners are critical to improving Veterans' health and well-being. This is why the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has joined forces with the [Institute for Healthcare Improvement's](#) 100 Million Healthier Lives initiative to form the Veterans Hub. Coordinated by OCE, the Veterans Hub is a network of organizations and coalitions working to empower Veterans to be the healthiest they can be. The Veterans Hub's goal is 20 million Veterans living healthier lives by 2020.



The Veterans Hub seeks dedicated individuals, nongovernmental organizations, and local, state, and federal organizations engaged in efforts to address the social determinants of health. These include access to safe housing, food security, education, employment, reliable transportation, spiritual support, and comprehensive health care services.

EXPAND THE VETERANS HUB NETWORK

Any organization committed to advancing Veterans' health can help expand the Veterans Hub network by sharing information with their public affairs officers, local chapters, and other colleagues about how to join and get the benefits of membership. An increase Veterans Hub membership translates into more organizations directly supporting Veterans nationwide. Help boost membership by communicating this information to your networks:

Sign up at <https://www.100mlives.org>

Create and update Veterans Hub action plans, which measure the impact of efforts to improve Veterans' health.

Connect with other members

Veterans Hub membership includes entry into the 100 Million Healthier Lives social media platform, connect.100mlives.org, where Veterans Hub partners collaborate, network, and post information about their work.

Share resources

Members also receive access to an extensive range of network resources to enhance health outcomes and well-being in communities across the country.

"Every community organization with a stake in improving Veterans' health can be part of the Veterans Hub network, which is building bridges between organizations, communities, and social support systems. The aim is for the Veterans Hub to create enabling conditions to support its mission and theme, 'Working together to help Veterans thrive.'"

– Lelia Jackson, Director of OCE

LEARN MORE WITH THESE VETERANS HUB RESOURCES

Read and share the Veterans Hub fact sheet at <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/docs/VetHubFactsheet.pdf>.

Ask questions by contacting Lauren Korshak, Lauren.Korshak@va.gov or emailing the Office of Community Engagement, CommunityEngagement@va.gov.

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

VA employees can find the tools by visiting the OCE Pulse page at <https://www.vapulse.net/community/vha-office-of-community-engagement>.

SERVICE DOG SPOTLIGHT: WALT HUTTON AND BUSTER, SERVICE AND CARE

Every night at bedtime, service dog Buster gathers his toys from around the house and places them carefully in his crate. Then, he jumps into bed with his owner Walt Hutton.

“I know I can rely on him He lays down on me every night. But then, he’s got to scoot over,” said Mr. Hutton, a Vietnam-era Veteran. Buster, a three-year-old yellow Labrador retriever, weighs 90 pounds.

Mr. Hutton is one of the first group of Veterans who have received an extension of VA-provided veterinary benefits for Buster’s care through the Mental Health Mobility Service Dog initiative. Mr. Hutton has lived with agoraphobia and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from his time serving in the U.S. Marine Corps.

The initiative supports veterinary health benefits for service dogs working with Veterans like Mr. Hutton who have mobility impairments caused by a mental health condition. The effort is a collaboration between the VA Offices of Mental Health Services and Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service that is coordinated by CCI.

Under this initiative, VA pays for a veterinary health insurance policy for service dogs who are trained through programs certified by Assistance Dogs International. Coverage includes annual visits for preventative care, dental cleanings, urgent/emergent care, and prescription medications. The benefit excludes grooming, boarding, or other routine expenses.

So far 48 Veterans have received veterinary benefits through the initiative. Of those, 11 were matched with dogs under the initiative, 26 were already using service dogs when they applied for the benefit, and another 11 are awaiting a service dog match. The goal is to reach 100 eligible Veterans by December 2018. Next year, CCI will evaluate data gathered in this small-scale demonstration to determine whether it is feasible to make this benefit available for all qualifying Veterans enrolled in VA care.



Buster, a service dog, prepares for a walk on his treadmill. Buster and his owner Walt Hutton were paired as part of the new Mental Health Mobility Service Dog initiative facilitated by CCI.

BUSTER'S IMPACT

In April 2018, Buster and Mr. Hutton were matched and trained by Smoky Mountain Service Dogs based in Lenoir City, Tennessee. The training was intensive, lasting several hours each day with two trainers from Smoky Mountain. They took Mr. Hutton and Buster on outings to practice how Buster would assist Mr. Hutton once they returned home.

Buster accompanies Mr. Hutton to every appointment at his VA Community-Based Outpatient Center. He has always had a dog as a pet since his retirement from the Marine Corps, but Buster is his first service dog. Mr. Hutton said Buster's assistance is invaluable.

"Buster has saved my life more than once, I'm sure. Just because he was there. He gives me a reason to get up every morning," Mr. Hutton said.

LEARN MORE

- Read more about VA veterinary benefits for service dogs of Veterans with mobility issues related to mental health issues in CCI's Mental Health Mobility Service Dogs [fact sheet](#).

HEALING UNDER PRESSURE: HYPERBARIC OXYGEN THERAPY (HBOT) CLINICAL DEMONSTRATION EXPANDS TO TWO MORE SITES

Veterans in South-Central Texas and Central Florida diagnosed with difficult-to-treat posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may soon have the option of receiving hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) through an expansion of a CCI-facilitated clinical demonstration to two new sites.

A total of four VA Medical Centers will now be offering HBOT to Veterans diagnosed with PTSD who have not found relief from standard treatments such as medication and talk therapy.

This multisite clinical demonstration is facilitated by CCI, which works to expand Veterans' access to emerging therapies that show strong anecdotal evidence of effectiveness while researchers undertake formal studies to assess their efficacy.

"VHA has had the reputation of being slow to change or try new things. I think that's an area where we have made tremendous strides, and this is a prime example," said Dr. Beth Jeffries, Director of the PTSD program at the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System in Muskogee, one of the two original HBOT demonstration sites.

HBOT has long been used for decompression sickness. It is not known how HBOT works to alleviate PTSD symptoms, but increased oxygen is thought to support healing in tissues throughout the body. During HBOT, patients receive medical grade oxygen under increased atmospheric pressure in one of two types of hyperbaric chambers that can treat one person at a time or several people at once.

The Texas and Florida facilities are formalizing their referral process and are expected to begin treating patients later this year. The new sites are the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa, which is operated in cooperation with the Undersea Oxygen Clinic and Florida Hospital; and South Texas Veterans Health Care



System in San Antonio, in cooperation with Nix Health and the San Antonio Military Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston.

They join two HBOT sites already treating Veterans: Eastern Oklahoma VA in cooperation with Tulsa Wound Care and Hyperbaric Center at Oklahoma State University Medical Center; and VA Northern California Health Care System in cooperation with David Grant Medical Center on Travis Air Force Base.

Through these clinical demonstrations Veterans enrolled in VA health care can access HBOT therapy if they have previously tried two traditional evidence-based treatment methods and have not had significant improvement of their PTSD symptoms. So far, six Veterans referred to the Muskogee program are receiving treatment. The Northern California demonstration is accepting referrals.

“Veterans have said they want this, and we’re trying. We’re thinking outside of the box and trying new things,” Dr. Jeffries said.

LEARN MORE

- Check out the [CCI fact sheet](#) for information about other CCI demonstrations.
- Learn about ongoing HBOT research in the [HBOT evidence brief](#).

VETERANS AT SAN DIEGO WILL BENEFIT FROM INNOVATIVE SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER TREATMENT PROGRAM

Veterans with substance use disorder in San Diego will have faster access to treatment through an innovative pilot program facilitated by CCI.

The Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment program, offered by the VA San Diego Healthcare System, is a partnership with Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and private facilities that serve Veterans diagnosed with issues related to use of alcohol or other drugs.

The program features intensive case management, 24/7 counseling, and a multimodal approach to substance use treatment. It was first developed and used throughout Veterans Integrated Service Network 2 with effective results. CCI helped the program expand to the San Diego VA by facilitating local collaborations between the San Diego VA and private rehabilitation facilities.

Veterans who arrive at the emergency room in need of alcohol or opioid rehabilitation are driven in a counselor-staffed van to private inpatient rehabilitation facilities, where they undergo detoxification, begin counseling, and learn transcendental meditation. They are trained to use a mobile app that keeps them in constant contact with program counselors and case managers. Mobile tools promote recovery, prevent relapse, and provide predictive analytics that enhance care coordination.

The program works by integrating care between VHA and participating private rehabilitation providers. Veterans can access providers at any time through their case manager, the mobile app, or the call center. Program partners include VA Care in the Community and the San Diego VA.

The program includes the following components:

- *Intensive case management*
- *Transportation to a rehabilitation facility staffed by an addiction counselor*

- *Inpatient detoxification and an up to 14-day rehabilitation stay*
- *Outpatient rehabilitation*
- *Pharmacotherapy*
- *Transcendental meditation instruction*
- *24/7 access to counselors and information via a call center and interactive smartphone app that Veterans can use to track mood, activity, and appointments*

The first patients are expected to enroll in the program in fall 2018.

LEARN MORE

- Interested in what VA Care in the Community Does? Check out their [website](#).
- Visit the Office of Mental Health [Substance Use Disorder website](#) to see how VHA helps Veterans recover from alcohol and substance use disorder issues.



SUD INITIATIVE RECEIVES INNOVATION AWARD

The SUD program won a 2018 Fed HealthIT100 award for the technological infrastructure designed to support the integrated program.

The SUD program will provide increased access to care for up to 1,000 San Diego-area patients who are diagnosed with alcohol and opiate addiction and who have limited access to care within VHA.

INNOVATIONS INBOX

COMMEMORATE MILITARY FAMILIES MONTH THROUGH CARE INNOVATION

As the nation prepares for Veterans and Military Families Month commemorations in November, CCI reminds our health industry partners that we seek emerging therapies that may enhance Veterans' physical and mental well-being when other treatments have not been successful.

CCI encourages health innovators to consider submitting a proposal that describes an emerging health care treatment or new use of an existing treatment option. CCI is particularly interested in treatments intended to help Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or chronic pain and Veterans at risk of suicide. A proposed therapy must demonstrate:

Safety. *Proposals must describe interventions that are safe and ethical to provide to Veterans.*

Clinical Innovation. *Proposed interventions can be a new idea that has not yet been fully evaluated or an innovative application of an existing modality.*

Clinical Benefit. *Proposed ideas should enhance Veterans' well-being.*

Feasibility. *Proposed innovations must be adoptable by VHA.*

Share innovative treatment options with CCI through our online submission portal at <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/CCISubmitaProposal.asp>.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



Dr. Margaret Naeser

Championing LED Therapy for Veterans with TBI

Current position:

Research Linguist/Speech-Language Pathologist, VA Boston Healthcare System.

Years with VA:

45.

Education:

Bachelor's degree from Smith College; doctorate from the University of Wisconsin. Postdoctoral studies conducted from 1970 to 1972 at UCLA and California State University in Long Beach, California.

How long have you been involved with traumatic brain injury (TBI) research?

Thirty-five years. I started working with stroke rehabilitation patients, which led to working with TBI. In 2006, the idea of using light-emitting diode (LED) therapy to treat TBI was suggested by Michael R. Hamblin, Ph.D., Cell Biologist, of the Wellman Center for Photomedicine at Massachusetts General Hospital. My colleagues and I published our first report in 2011. Other papers followed in 2014 and 2016.

What is your motivation for working with TBI patients?

There are an estimated 5.3 million people living with TBI-related disabilities in the United States, and we are currently developing new treatments to improve cognition and reduce emotional outbursts. LED therapy has so much potential because we think it helps the damaged brain cells to heal. If exposed to the proper wavelengths of light, damaged cells “wake up” and start functioning again.

Are there any patient experiences that exemplify your work with TBI?

We had a Veteran who had been in numerous other treatments and nothing seemed to work. After a few weeks of LED treatment, he was (experiencing) dramatic improvement. He has since been able to return to work and maintain his level of health. He let us know how grateful he was and thanked us for giving him his brain back.

Where do you see TBI treatments going in the future?

Home treatments, like the clinical demonstration project going on now at the [VA Boston Healthcare System's Jamaica Plain campus](#), will be the way to go, since it is much more convenient for our patients. The LED treatments applied to the head require only 20 minutes of use (a few days a week).

We believe there might be applications for LED therapy to address dementia, Alzheimer's disease, post-traumatic stress disorder, post-stroke problems such as aphasia, and even autism and Down syndrome. We just don't know when the next improvements might happen that could change everything we know about TBI treatments.



→ Get Involved

OCE

- Want to partner with VA? Email us at CommunityEngagement@va.gov.
- Visit our website at <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/oceabout.asp>.
- Get previous issues of the newsletter on the website by visiting the link above and clicking the left-hand navigation bar.

CCI

- Share stories of Veteran-service dog pairing successes under the Mental Health Mobility Service Dog initiative to VHACCISD@va.gov.
- Visit our website at <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/index.asp>.
- Submit an emerging therapy proposal through our portal at <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/CCISubmitaProposal.asp>.