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VHA National Center for Healthcare  
Advancement and Partnerships

# Treating PTSD— Mind, Body, and Soul

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
National Center for Healthcare  
Advancement and Partnerships



# A Note From the Nurse Executive



We at the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) hope you are keeping safe and enjoying summer. VHA has been, and continues to be, instrumental in ensuring Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors receive the COVID-19 vaccination to promote the health and well-being of all Veterans and the communities in which they live.

Our office's work to protect and improve Veterans' health and well-being continues through fostering public-private partnerships and by exploring innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies for conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As we observe [PTSD Awareness Month](#) in June, it is important for Veterans and their loved ones to know that effective PTSD treatments are available throughout VHA, such as cognitive processing therapy, prolonged exposure therapy, and eye movement desensitization and processing (EMDR) therapy.

In addition to these trauma-focused psychotherapies and medication, other treatments can help with PTSD, too. Veterans you'll read about in this issue have found PTSD symptom relief from a treatment typically used for chronic pain called stellate ganglion block (SGB), a potential emerging therapy supported by HAP, ([page 3](#)) and through participating in a therapeutic agriculture program ([page 4](#)). Mind-body therapy can also be helpful for PTSD. Read on [page 5](#) about how VHA partner Y-USA is helping Veterans diagnosed with PTSD by offering them a Tai Chi class.

VHA is also fortunate to have partners who are helping Veterans prevent and find support to fight lung cancer. Learn more about the how the VHA is working with Go2 Foundation for Lung Cancer and the American Lung Association on [page 12](#) as we approach World Lung Cancer Day later this summer.

In other news: HAP is supporting a new partnership that focuses on helping military service members who are transitioning to civilian life ([page 7](#)). Plus, HAP's signature event, the National VHA Community Partnership Challenge, will recognize the winners at an awards ceremony slated for late August ([page 8](#)).

And, in case you missed it, you can also find stories we have published in recent months on a retired Army staff sergeant who feels called to visit her fellow Veterans with her therapy dog ([page 9](#)), two VHA partnerships that are working to end food insecurity ([page 11](#)), and a VA health system's 30-year collaboration with a nonprofit that never fails to answer the call to help a Veteran in need, even if it's 11 p.m. ([page 10](#)).

In good health,  
Dr. Tracy L. Weistreich

*Nurse Executive, VHA National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships*

## Marine Veteran finds that SGB alleviates some of his PTSD symptoms

Marine Veteran Adam Castillo served in three combat tours over a 10-year period, starting in 2004. Diagnosed with PTSD, he has tried medication in addition to cognitive behavioral therapy, prolonged exposure therapy, and EMDR therapy.

All of the above are considered evidence-based treatments for PTSD, and they helped Mr. Castillo, but his brain was in a state where it “never shuts off.”

Through his VA licensed clinical social worker, the 20-year Veteran learned about SGB, an injection of an anesthetic to a bundle of nerves located at the base of the neck. He tried SGB in March at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System, which carried out a successful clinical program evaluation on the use of SGB in combination with evidence-based therapy to alleviate PTSD symptoms. The initiative is supported by HAP, which explores innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies to help Veterans who have not achieved optimal outcomes from evidence-based treatment.

Psychotherapy, Mr. Castillo said, helped him put things into perspective, but SGB offers something else: “It takes my mind out of overdrive.”

Immediately after the shot, he said he felt “really good and in a calm state. I found myself being able to go out a lot more. Since 2014, I didn’t really do anything, and if I did, I found myself getting completely wasted just to calm myself.”

He said the shot didn’t hurt, but he had reservations about potentially losing a sharp awareness of his surroundings, which he learned from serving in the Marines. “I was afraid it would make me super numb,” he said.

Instead, he’s more engaged. He’s going on more outings with his family and recently took them on a trip to Las Vegas. He said he feels less anxiety, and his family notices he doesn’t get as angry anymore.

“I still get agitated, but it’s a longer fuse now,” said Mr. Castillo.

Mr. Castillo is now using acupuncture to alleviate PTSD symptoms and is considering getting a second SGB injection. The SGB program evaluation found that some Veterans benefitted from an additional injection.

Mr. Castillo said it’s important to have realistic expectations about SGB. He said he still has bad days, but that’s why he continues to see an acupuncturist twice a week.

Christine Eickhoff, HAP health systems specialist, said, “SGB is not a ‘cure’ for PTSD, but there is growing evidence that it can alleviate some PTSD symptoms, such as hyperalertness, anxiety, and exaggerated startle responses, which can help Veterans experience immediate relief and engage in evidence-based PTSD treatments more successfully. Some VA clinicians are already using SGB in combination with evidence-based PTSD treatments such as medication and psychotherapy. The evidence and positive outcomes shared by Veterans and VA providers are growing.”

For more information on SGB, visit [va.gov/healthpartnerships/hanews.asp](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships/hanews.asp)



*Adam Castillo, now a clinical social worker, is a Marine Veteran.*

## Army Veteran says internship through a VA farming partnership gave him a new lease on life

Army Veteran Eric Poston said that he's "like a seed that's been planted to grow," just like the lettuce and tomato seeds he plants at the Baltimore County Center for Maryland Agriculture and Farm Park (AG Center). There, Mr. Poston participates in an internship offering training in horticulture and mental health recovery.

Mr. Poston said he's experienced the same growth as his plants because becoming involved with gardening and farming helped him recover from substance abuse and PTSD.

"There's something therapeutic about getting in the dirt, pulling up weeds, planting things, and watching them grow," Mr. Poston said.

Mr. Poston came to the AG Center internship after graduating from the Horticulture and Sustainable Agriculture Training Program. That program is a [Veteran Community Partnership \(VCP\)](#) collaboration among VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS), the [TALMAR Horticultural Therapy Center](#), and other entities. The training program at TALMAR is in its second year and 57 Veterans have participated.

The TALMAR program was an important part of Mr. Poston's recovery, he explained, because he learned to have a sense of structure.

"I had to get up early in the morning, and I hadn't done that since the military," he said with a laugh. Growing up in South Carolina, he explained, it "wasn't cool to go out and pick tomatoes. I didn't think about eating vegetables or taking care of myself." Now he eats butter lettuce or mustard greens he grows himself, gets more than 15,000 steps daily, and is off the 12 medications he used to take.

At the AG Center farm, Mr. Poston bonds with other employees and volunteers. He also bonds with the goats, pigs, and horses there.



*Veteran Eric Poston enjoys his farm internship.*

Mr. Poston works from 7:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. three days per week and receives a stipend. In the future, he said he'd like to become a "master gardener" with the program. Then he'd have a plot of land he could rent from the county and could grow produce to sell at the local farmer's market.

"I want to provide nutrition to some of the food deserts in the city where I came from," Mr. Poston said.

The VCP Initiative at VHA is a joint project of VHA offices, including HAP.

HAP psychologist and Health Systems Specialist Dr. Jamie D. Davis is the collaborations lead for the VCP initiative. She said that VCPs like the TALMAR program and collaborations like the AG Center internship program are invaluable for Veterans' well-being.

"Programs like these offer Veterans exercise, food security, employment, social connection, and so much more," Dr. Davis said. "These are all positive social determinants of health, which we know [decrease Veterans' risk of suicide](#). Collaborations like these that holistically address the mind, body, and spirit help VHA offer even more supportive resources to Veterans."

## Veterans experience ‘healing powers’ of Tai Chi class offered through YMCA

The practice of Tai Chi—a mind-body exercise combining slow-flowing intentional movements with breathing, awareness, and visualization—originated in China more than 500 years ago. Studies have shown that the martial art can improve physical strength and mental resilience, as well as positively impact individuals diagnosed with PTSD, chronic pain, cancer, and mood disorders.

More than 80% of specialized VA programs to treat PTSD offer some form of mind-body therapy, such as Tai Chi, yoga, and guided imagery, according to [VA’s Office of Research and Development](#).

Veterans in Grand Forks, North Dakota, are some of the latest individuals who are experiencing firsthand the benefits of Tai Chi.

“I’m just happy to be giving back to Veterans in my local community,” said Emi Osowski. Ms. Osowski is married to an active-duty member of the National Guard and began teaching Tai Chi at the Grand Forks YMCA Family Center earlier this year.

“I think of Tai Chi as a martial art with healing powers, and I’ve experienced that myself. I started experiencing some joint aches and chronic



*Ms. Emi Osowski instructs a Tai Chi class at the Grand Forks YMCA.*

pain as I got older. Tai Chi movements gave me relief,” said Ms. Osowski. “And my goal now is to teach Veterans that this same relief is available to them. This could be relief from physical aches or mental pains for someone diagnosed with PTSD. Tai Chi is about surrendering yourself to the movement and I think that’s why so many people enjoy it so much.”

Ms. Osowski’s class is one of many Tai Chi classes offered to Veterans across the country through the Tai Chi for Vets program. The program is made possible by a [nonmonetary partnership created between VHA and Y-USA](#), the national entity that oversees YMCA facilities across the country. HAP manages this partnership with the goal of promoting the health and well-being of Veterans, their caregivers, and their families.

The availability of these community resources and opportunities for recreational activities are examples of how HAP is increasing access to positive social determinants of health (SDOH) for Veterans everywhere. SDOH are conditions in the environment in which Veterans live, learn, work, play, worship, and age—and support for positive SDOH are connected to better health outcomes.

“By collaborating with Y-USA and offering classes, we are making a real difference in the lives of Veterans,” said Dr. Kimberly Pugh, health systems specialist with HAP. Dr. Pugh oversees the VHA—Y-USA partnership at the national level.

Ms. Osowski believes better health is only a couple of movements away.

“You don’t have to be an expert to start Tai Chi, and no one is here to judge you if I move to the right and you move to the left,” said Ms. Osowski. “Tai Chi is about finding a comfortable movement that works for you and following it.”

To learn more about the programs and benefits of the VHA and Y-USA partnership, visit [va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/yusa](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/yusa).

## New Salesforce Military Trailhead course educates Veterans on VA benefits and resources

A long, winding path full of twists and turns may make for an exciting hike in the outdoors. But no one wants the same experience trying to understand their VA benefits.

A new training course in [Trailhead](#)—an online platform created by Salesforce Military—now gives Veterans a convenient roadmap to learn about everything from VA health care to financial services benefits and career assistance. The free training module, “[VA Benefits for Veterans](#),” includes five different units, can be completed in less than an hour, and is open to all Veterans and military spouses no matter their age or experience. Since the module was launched in February 2020, more than 1,900 users have completed the course.

The course was made possible through a nonmonetary partnership between VHA and Salesforce, which was created to support Veterans and their spouses through their transition out of active duty and into the civilian workforce. The partnership is managed by HAP, and more than 90 Veterans and military spouses have been referred by VA to the Salesforce Military program within the last two years.

“We are extremely excited about how this new learning path can help educate Veterans and their spouses about VA benefits,” said Christine Eickhoff, health systems specialist for HAP. “Since every Veteran may not regularly engage with VA, this program has a great potential of connecting Veterans who otherwise would be unaware of these resources.”

Since its launch in 2014, Salesforce Military has provided military personnel, Veterans, and their spouses with free training in high-demand

technology skills and certifications to help them land meaningful careers. Current Trailhead offerings also include:

- Courses for Veterans and their spouses to gain tech skills, business skills, and soft skills
- Certification trainings for Salesforce administrators, developers, and architects
- Communities to connect with mentors and potential employers

In the future, VHA and Salesforce will continue collaborating to improve social determinants of health (SDOH) for Veterans by creating additional online courses. SDOH are conditions in the environments in which Veterans live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. This partnership aims to support Veterans across SDOH such as economic stability, employment, health literacy, and both physical and mental health.

“This type of partnership is crucial for improving access to positive SDOH for our nation’s heroes, and a great example of how we can work with national and community organizations to improve the health and well-being of Veterans,” said Dr. Tracy L. Weistreich, nurse executive for HAP. “We look forward to creating additional Trailhead courses that will increase opportunities for Veterans everywhere.”

To learn more about resources offered through Salesforce Military, visit [salesforce.com/military](https://salesforce.com/military).

## VA partnership guides service members through transition to civilian life

U.S. Army Veteran Brian Roeder thought he knew what transitioning from the military to civilian life would be like. He had a job lined up and a plan to get started on his master's degree. However, he said he didn't realize the toll that transitioning to civilian life would have on him emotionally.

"There is a loss of identity when you transition out," Mr. Roeder said. "I thought I wouldn't have any of that, but I definitely did."

Fortunately, Mr. Roeder was able to turn to one of his Army colleagues, Joseph Geraci. Dr. Geraci is a retired lieutenant colonel, a licensed psychologist at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center, and co-director of the VHA Transitioning Servicemember/Veteran and Suicide Prevention Center. Mr. Roeder said Dr. Geraci's support, insight, and mentorship provided him "the light that kept me going in the right direction."

"Joe coached me through the things that you don't know about during your transition, and he had this relentless gentle pressure of positive encouragement."

When Mr. Roeder's plans for his transition were scuttled by the COVID-19 outbreak, Geraci helped him to stay busy and continue to look for new opportunities. Eventually, they realized that Mr. Roeder had a knack for speaking with other service members about the transition—so he joined the Expiration Term of Service Sponsorship Program (ETS-SP)—a program that helps guide service members through the transition to civilian life.

Mr. Roeder now helps transitioning service members enroll in the ETS-SP program, which recently formalized a partnership with VA to facilitate better access to community and VA



*Mr. Roeder and Dr. Geraci promote the ETS-SP program at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center.*

programs for transitioning service members and Veterans during this important time of their lives. The partnership was facilitated by HAP.

"Anybody can get you out, get you a job, get you a place to live," Mr. Roeder said. "But this program works toward what you want. It doesn't allow you to settle, and it maximizes your potential."

Mr. Roeder is currently sponsoring a transitioning service member in South Carolina.

"His goals are good," Mr. Roeder said. "I'm working with him to put that plan together and linking him to resources. And he told me that for the first time in his life, he has nothing but positive options to choose from!"

Mr. Roeder said mentoring a transitioning service member has been incredibly rewarding for him as well.

"I think I'm getting as much out of it as they are," Mr. Roeder said. "Just reconnecting with service members is rewarding and it's enjoyable. I'm happier than the service member is when I hear he's doing well and how he's turned his life around.

"It's been completely positive—both being mentored and at the same time sponsoring another service member and giving back."

## National Community Partnership Challenge winners to be honored this summer

The entries are in, and three will win the 2021 National VHA Community Partnership Challenge, an annual competition that shines a spotlight on outstanding partnerships between local VHA entities and their nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

VA and VHA leaders will honor the winners in a virtual ceremony, tentatively scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 19. The winners will be recognized by acting under secretary for health, or designee at VHA, and with commendations from VA Secretary Denis McDonough. The Challenge is facilitated by HAP.

This year's theme was "Adaptability in a Changing World," and entrants were asked to explain how their partnerships addressed diversity, equity, and inclusion within one or more of five categories including:

- Clinical and self-care
- Support of social determinants of health
- Newly transitioning service members
- COVID-19 pandemic/flu
- Caregivers/families

Georgeanna Bady, HAP health systems specialist, said the entries truly reflected VA's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, which reflect the value public-private partnerships have on comprehensive care and services.

"All of us are keeping those values in the forefront of our minds as we create new partnerships because our Veterans are diverse. We are meeting their individualized needs and taking cultural sensitivity into account to increase their health and well-being," she said.

For example, VHA partnerships that focus on medical conditions such as kidney health or diabetes often include dietary recommendations for patients. However, diets vary widely by culture. "You have to meet people where they are to help them manage their condition," Ms. Bady said.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, the 2021 Challenge attracted nearly 40 entries, just a few less than in 2020. Ms. Bady said the robust response reflects the VA field's "excellence in knowing their community and their commitment and advocacy in making sure that Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors are taken care of, no matter what the physical environment."

For more information on the Challenge and how to enter next year's competition, be sure to bookmark [va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships) for updates.

## HAP updates VHA public-private partnership training for VA employees

HAP has recently updated its VHA Public-Private Partnerships (P3) training. This training is designed to equip VA employees with the necessary tools and information to develop responsible and productive partnerships with nongovernmental organizations and is a supplement to the national P3 Directive, 1098.

The training includes topics such as, "Why VHA forms Public-Private Partnerships," "The Benefits of Public-Private Partnerships," "Examples of Public-Private Partnerships," "How to Write a Partnership Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)," and many other topics.

The updated P3 training is now available on the VA Talent Management System (TMS) website. The course number is VA 24092. For more information about P3 training or development of a formal P3, contact HAP staff at [VHA\\_Partnerships@va.gov](mailto:VHA_Partnerships@va.gov).



## Pet Partners volunteer gives back to fellow Veterans through animal therapy visits

Army Veteran Cheryl Bann began visiting the Minneapolis VA Medical Center (VAMC) with her therapy dog partner, Wilson, in 2013. Before the coronavirus pandemic, Ms. Bann and Wilson visited Veterans twice a month as a Pet Partners volunteer team. VHA partnered with Pet Partners in 2019 to share benefits of the human-animal bond to improve Veterans' quality of life and social engagement by increasing access to animal-assisted interventions, including animal-assisted therapy, throughout the VA health care system.



*Wilson and Army Veteran Cheryl Bann.*

Ms. Bann explained how other Veterans—or anyone—can get involved as a Pet Partners therapy animal team.

There are differences between therapy animals and service dogs. A service animal refers to a dog that is individually trained to do work and perform specific tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. Therapy animals are used, usually in a clinical setting, to improve quality of life and improve physical, developmental, social, cognitive and/or emotional health functioning. These assistance animals can include animals other than dogs.

Other Pet Partners volunteers, [including Army Veteran Walt Davis and John LaRoe](#), who also

visit VAMCs with their dogs, said the experience is meaningful for them, their animals, and the Veterans they visit. Ms. Bann agreed.

"I joke that Wilson's the show and I'm the driver and calendar keeper," Ms. Bann said about their visits. Ms. Bann recently [wrote a blog](#) about her experiences with visiting Veterans who are rehabilitating from various injuries in the polytrauma unit.

"Even our presence in the room seems to lower [people's] anxiety," she said. Wilson will walk around the room, allowing patients to pet him, or will simply rest his head on someone's arm.

"All of the sudden [Veterans] get comfortable. This isn't really a 'hospital thing,' it's just a bunch of guys getting together," Ms. Bann continued. Some patients who experience speech disabilities try to talk when Wilson is around.

"It's been really cool to see how just the presence of my animal can open up that communication," she said. Ms. Bann said it's a detailed process to register an animal as a therapy animal, and Wilson went through a series of trainings and obedience classes. It's important, she said, that anyone interested in registering their dog as a therapy animal consider whether their animal is right for the job.

"When you have a therapy dog, one of the things you want to look for is what kinds of visits would be enjoyable for your animal," she said. "You are your animal's best advocate."

The process is worth it, Ms. Bann explained. She always wanted to "give back" to the VA and encourages other Veterans to do the same.

"For me, it's almost a calling or mission," she said.

For more information about becoming a therapy animal team, visit [petpartners.org/volunteer/](https://petpartners.org/volunteer/). The Pet Partners partnership is supported by HAP.

## Partnership that serves Veterans in California has a three-decade history of success

Partnerships throughout VA add to what VA is already able to provide to Veterans—when partners bring their resources and strategies to the table, the result is always good news for Veterans and their families and communities. One such “good news” partnership is between the [VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement \(CDCE\)](#) leadership within the VA Central California Health Care System and the nonprofit Central Valley Veterans (CVV). This partnership is especially noteworthy because it [has been in place for 30 years](#). Other partnerships throughout VA can find inspiration in the longevity of this collaboration that offers Veterans so much.

CDCE and CVV share the goal of assisting Veterans and filling the gaps in areas where Veterans may not qualify for benefits. CVV offers emergency food service, temporary housing and housing funding, and other support to Veterans. Their goal is to “provide temporary support that translates into permanent solutions.” CVV prioritizes providing help to single mother Veterans, then single fathers, single women, couples, and single men.

“Keeping families together, and women and children off the streets, is foremost in all their efforts,” said Will McCullough, public affairs officer from VA Central California Health Care System. “Gaining permanent housing and keeping Veterans working are also key focal points.”

Mary Golden, CDCE chief at VA Central California Health Care System, said that the CVV team is her “go-to” when it comes to helping Veterans.

“I have called CVV at 11 p.m. about Veterans who need assistance, including emergency lodging, a ride home from the ER; whatever is asked, they’ve ALWAYS come through. There is not a time I can recall, in my 10 years of working with them, that they did not find a way to meet the Veteran’s need,” she said.



*Food Drive boxes from VA Central California Health Care System & Central Valley Veterans partnership.*

Ms. Golden offered some tips about how other partnerships within VA can ensure their collaborations have the same staying power as this one:

- Set priorities and limits for providing services, and adhere to them
- Stay actively involved with community resource committees, especially those with representatives from local and national Veterans Service Organizations
- Become very involved with your local VA and CDCE teams, and consider serving on VA advisory committees and councils

HAP supports partnerships like this one throughout VHA. Dr. Tracy L. Weistreich, nurse executive for HAP, said that this partnership serves as a blueprint for others throughout VA and VHA.

“Partnerships like this one are vital to VA and the health and well-being of Veterans” she said. “When partners have a shared passion to help Veterans, are active and organized, and are engaged in the local community, the results can be tremendous.”

## Veterans can turn to VA resources and partnerships for food security

Many VHA partnerships support Veterans' access to food security, which is the state of [having access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food](#). These partnerships add to the services VHA already provides to Veterans—the [VHA Nutrition and Food Services office](#), for example, offers a budget friendly meal planning worksheet, nutrition tips for Veterans without homes, and a weekly meal planner grocery list.

VHA's partnership with [MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger](#) also contributes to Veterans' nutrition and food security. [Formalized in July 2020](#), the partnership ensures Veterans have reliable access to food. MAZON has been urging the presidential administration to [expand Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) benefits to Veterans](#).

Josh Protas, vice president of public policy at MAZON, explained that Congress just approved an initiative [to extend a 15% increase to SNAP benefits](#) through September 2021. What MAZON is concerned about, he said, is the Veteran "SNAP participation gap."

"Research shows that of Veterans who are eligible for SNAP, only about one in three are in households that participate in the program," Mr. Protas explained.

There are several reasons for that—stigma around asking for help can be particularly pronounced in the Veteran population, Mr. Protas said. There is also a lack of awareness about SNAP and misinformation about the program. SNAP is not a "handout"—it is an entitlement, such as Social Security, that everyone pays into through taxes. Some people also may think, Mr. Protas continued, that if they use SNAP benefits, they're "taking" them from someone else.

"That's not the case—anyone who is eligible to receive the assistance can get the assistance," he

explained. "There isn't a limited amount of funding where if you take the benefit, you're reducing the pool of funds for others."

To counteract this stigma and misinformation, MAZON is helping uplift the stories of Veterans who utilize the SNAP program on the "[This is Hunger](#)" project. VA has also been working with MAZON on a brochure about food insecurity and SNAP that is targeted to Veterans. MAZON has also helped create an [online training course alongside the PsychArmor Institute](#)—a VA partner that helps support [Veteran Community Partnerships](#) and the [Veterans Crisis Line](#)—that helps providers who work with Veterans provide solutions to food insecurity.

Partnerships help Veterans access the food security and nutrition they need all year round, such as the one with MAZON and a VHA collaboration with the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), which provides support on nutrition and anti-poverty issues. HAP supports many of these partnerships.

"We are able to do so much at VHA to increase Veterans' access to sufficient, nutritious food, but we can't do it all alone," said HAP Health Systems Specialist Georgeanna Bady. "Partners like MAZON help ensure Veteran families always have food on the table."



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*Many VHA partnerships support Veteran's access to food security.*

## Two VA partnerships help Veterans fight lung cancer

Aug. 1 marks World Lung Cancer Day and, over the last year, VHA has partnered with two nonprofit organizations that are dedicated to lung cancer prevention, getting more people screened for lung cancer, and helping those who are diagnosed with lung diseases live healthier lives. These collaborations with [GO<sub>2</sub> Foundation for Lung Cancer](#) and [American Lung Association](#), facilitated by HAP, add to the lung cancer and lung disease supportive services that VA already offers, such as information on who should be [screened for lung cancer](#) and programs and services for [Veterans who want to quit smoking](#).

VA diagnoses 7,700 Veterans with lung cancer each year, and an estimated 900,000 remain at risk due to age, smoking, and environmental exposures during and after military service. The partnership between VHA and GO2 Foundation has achieved a number of milestones since it began in June 2020.

Three VA sites—in Birmingham, Alabama; Richmond, Virginia; and Wichita, Kansas;—have been designated as GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer “[Screening Centers of Excellence](#),” having met the criteria for providing responsible, high quality low-dose CT screening. Screening can detect lung cancer at its earliest and most treatable and curable stage.

Part of the VHA-GO2 Foundation partnership encourages information sharing between both entities. VA Drs. Drew Moghanaki and Jennifer Lewis presented at GO2’s Centers of Excellence Conference last fall, entitled “Leaving No Veteran Behind.” Dr. Moghanaki also presented at a virtual event for Veterans as part of GO2 Foundation’s [Lung Cancer Living Room series](#) to share information on lung cancer research and care continuum initiatives at VA.

GO2 also offers [supportive resources](#) specific to Veterans as a result of the partnership. The foundation has created a [Veteran-focused landing page](#) on its website that includes inspiring stories from Veterans who are living with lung cancer.

In addition, a fellow with the [VA-Partnership to Increase Access to Lung Screening](#) (VA-PALS), created a list of frequently asked questions for the [Go2 HelpLine](#) to help staff address common inquiries from Veterans and direct them to resources for VA benefits, lung cancer screening, and care. Since VA-PALS started in 2017, screening has expanded to 17 VA medical centers where more than 19,000 Veterans have been screened for lung cancer as a result of VHA’s partnerships with Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation, GO2 Foundation, and International Early Lung Cancer Action Program.

In December 2020, VHA partnered with American Lung Association, which focuses on improving lung health and preventing lung diseases such as cancer, in addition to COPD, pulmonary fibrosis, and asthma. Besides information sharing between VHA and the American Lung Association, the partnership encourages individual VA medical centers to create partnerships with their local association, and it encourages Veterans to use the association’s online resources, such as its [Lung Cancer Survivors group](#).

Georgeanna Bady, HAP health systems specialist said, “VHA’s partners help Veterans increase their understanding of the benefits of early screening and provide them with information on treatment options and emotional support.”

