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VHA National Center for Healthcare
Advancement and Partnerships

Bringing Resources to Veterans Through VHA Partnerships and Innovations

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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

As we prepare to close out 2021, Veterans Health Administration (VHA)'s National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) is reflecting on this past Veterans Day and the work our office conducted over the past year.

All our partnerships help Veterans access positive social determinants of health (SDOH)—the conditions where they live, learn, work, worship, play, and age. And all HAP partnerships aim to service Veterans of diverse ethnicities, racial and religious backgrounds, gender identities, and sexual orientations. VHA's goal is to bring services, education, and support to Veterans of all lived experiences and backgrounds, no matter where they live—and even if they aren't currently enrolled in VHA health care.

As one of the four programs within the Office of Discovery, Education, and Affiliate Networks (DEAN), HAP maintains a focus on inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA), which formed the guidelines for the office's upcoming VHA National Community Partnership Challenge that awards VHA front-line employees for innovative work with local and national partners in support of Veterans ([p 3](#)).

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of IDEA and SDOH as VA found Black and Hispanic Veterans were [more likely to test positive](#) for COVID-19 and [suffer greater job losses](#) and [reporting higher level of need](#) for resources like nutritious food. VHA is fortunate to have partnerships that augment its ability to help Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivor with those SDOH by training for high-paying technology jobs ([p 4](#)), delivering food to medically vulnerable Veterans ([p 6](#)), and coordinating seasonal donations of Christmas trees and holiday meals ([p 12](#)).

Supporting SDOH, which includes mental health, is also a key way HAP helps promote suicide prevention efforts among Veteran communities—VHA's number one clinical priority. You can read how one Veteran on a mission to prevent suicide helped create a new three-digit number for the Veterans Crisis Line ([p 7](#)). Facilitating partnerships that help VHA improve access to employment and nutritious food (positive SDOH) are one way HAP supports the public health approach to suicide prevention. Another way is by exploring innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies for conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In this issue, you can read about one Veteran's experience with an emerging PTSD therapy ([p 8](#)) available at a VA Medical Center (VAMC) through a HAP healthcare advancement initiative. These innovative therapies are helpful for Veterans for whom traditional, evidence-based therapies may not have worked. Sometimes these emerging therapies enable the Veteran enough relief of symptoms to resume, or start a new, evidence-based intervention available through VA.

We hope you enjoy reading more about how VHA, HAP, and our partners continue to support Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. All of us at VHA and HAP wish you a very happy holiday season and start to the new year.

In good health,
Dr. Tracy L. Weistreich
*Nurse Executive,
VHA National Center for
Healthcare Advancement
and Partnerships*



2022 VHA National Community Partnership Challenge focuses on resiliency, diversity, and access to opportunity

VHA employees who facilitate partnerships with community organizations focused on serving Veterans and valuing inclusion, diversity, equity, and access should consider applying to the Office of the Under Secretary for Health's (USH) 2022 VHA National Community Partnership Challenge (CPC).

The annual CPC is returning next year with submissions opening on January 10, 2022. Entries will be judged based on how well the partnerships address the competition's new **G.R.O.W.** theme domains:

- **Goal-Oriented:** Does the partnership take a goal-oriented approach to collaborations? (For example, does the partnership foster Veterans' self-determination and autonomy?)
- **Resiliency:** How well does the partnership address the social determinants of health, mental health, and/or suicide prevention while navigating our ever-evolving environment?
- **Opportunity:** What innovative approach does the partnership take to address gaps in care or services?
- **Wellness:** How does the partnership incorporate a whole-health perspective to reduce Veteran health risk factors (like diabetes) and increase protective factors (like health screenings) for Veterans?

Public-private partnerships augment VHA's resources to directly impact the needs of Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. In 2022, CPC's focus on resiliency and opportunities to increase access builds on the 2021 CPC theme "Adaptability in a Changing World."

In 2021, the USH recognized and awarded three VHA medical centers and their community partners that exemplified adaptability and serving diverse Veteran populations. The winners were:



- Ralph H. Johnson VA Health Care System's Veteran Safety and Planning with Community Hospitals to Prevent Suicide is a partnership with six local community health hospitals in South Carolina to ensure Veterans seeking inpatient mental health care scheduled appointments after discharge and had any safety plans and medications needed.

- Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research and Clinical Center (MIRECC) VA Patient Center of Inquiry

- Suicide Prevention Collaborative provides a learning collaborative model to aid community partners in building suicide prevention programs within their organizations.

- VA Palo Alto Health Care System and Bay Area Legal Aid for their medical-legal partnership helping identify patients with legal problems underlying their medical issues and integrating screening for legal assistance into Veterans' well-being assessment allowing social work to refer to the community partner for Veterans to access a cost-free attorney.

VHA's National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) manages the CPC, which has helped share best practices for collaborative health care partnerships like these for Veterans since the challenge began in 2014.

Since then, the CPC has recognized partnerships like the one in 2020 between the Richard VA Roudebush Medical Center and Catholic Charities in Indianapolis which [provided older Veterans](#) with help cooking, cleaning, transportation, as well as spiritual support.

For more information about the CPC and instructions on how to enter, be sure to check here for updates: vaww.oce.med.va.gov/pc/pcAbout.aspx.

For more information on HAP's mission, visit: va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/index.asp.

VHA Partnership with Salesforce helps thousands transition to new tech careers

Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) partnership with software company Salesforce is helping thousands of Veterans, Service members, and their families access high-paying work in the technology industry.

The [partnership](#) aims to augment the ways VHA assists the 200,000 Service members who transition from military to civilian life every year—many of whom look for new careers. VHA recognizes the importance of employment as a [social determinant of health](#) and helps connect Service members, Veterans, and military spouses to [resources that help them achieve their career goals](#) after leaving military service, resources like the free online technology training and certification programs offered by [Salesforce Military](#).

"Transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce can be daunting and jumping into a new industry can be as well," said Jared Crain, Salesforce Military's Director of Workforce Development. "I dealt with it myself when I transitioned from the army two years ago."



Jared Crain

Crain is a U.S. Army Veteran who served from 1999 to 2019 and has since [found a new calling](#) in helping his fellow Veterans reskill and upskill for employment after their military service.

Since the Salesforce Military training programs launched in 2014, Crain says 40,000 military community members have signed up to learn new tech skills and earn Salesforce certifications to help them find jobs. The company [recently pledged](#) to help 80,000 military community members over the next five years. The company has also enlisted more than 500 companies to pledge to help hire Veterans

and interview those who complete Salesforce's certifications. Since June 2021, VHA has helped more than 1,000 Veterans, Service members, and their spouses enroll in the Salesforce Military program.

More than 1,200 people who have completed Salesforce Military's training and certification program and landed new jobs in tech fields. "Surprisingly, while most industries and sectors saw a slow down during the pandemic, the Salesforce ecosystem actually saw an acceleration," said Crain. "There are more opportunities now for Veterans and military spouses working with the Salesforce platform than there were just 18 months ago."

These new tech workers are also starting jobs with high-paying salaries.

"Recently we've seen an average starting salary of \$87,000 for our members that are starting out in the ecosystem," he added. "These are also fantastic careers that continue to grow as our members develop their skills and grow their abilities."

Recently, Salesforce has seen a "spike in interest" from current Service members, Crain notes.

The VHA partnership with Salesforce has also led to additional resources for Veterans, beyond technical job training. Through collaboration under the partnership, staff from VHA and Salesforce created the [VA Benefits for Veterans](#) virtual training module to help Veterans learn about their benefits and how to access them. Crain said more than 2,000 people have accessed the module since its launch in February 2021.

"The VA helps support Veterans and their families across all facets of their lives, and one of the best ways to support them is through stable and meaningful employment," said Crain. "Salesforce Military exists to give members of the military community the right skills and certifications that employers are looking for right now. By coordinating our efforts we're able to more effectively and broadly impact the community."

To learn more about Salesforce Military, visit veterans.force.com/s/.

For more information on HAP's initiatives and partnerships, please visit: va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/updates.asp.

White Ribbon VA partnership supports healthy relationships for Veterans, their partners, and VA staff

[U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#) (VA) Secretary Denis McDonough held a virtual ceremony in April to underscore his zero-tolerance policy for gender-based harassment or sexual assault in VA facilities. During the ceremony, 700 people took the [White Ribbon VA pledge](#) to end domestic violence, harassment, and sexual assault. Among VA leaders across the country were [Veterans Service Organization](#) (VSO) leaders who joined the secretary in the ceremony.

In 2020, VA partnered with the [National Association of Social Workers](#) (NASW) and [White Ribbon USA](#) to create the [White Ribbon VA](#) partnership, which aims to eradicate sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence in VA workplaces, hospital systems, and communities. More than 12,000 people have taken the pledge, which is now included in new employee orientation and senior VA executive swearing-in ceremonies.

“We don’t want this topic to be taboo,” said Ms. Lelia Jackson, director of the [Veterans Health Administration \(VHA\) Assault and Harassment Prevention Office](#). “We want people to know they can talk about ending sexual assault and harassment and that VA takes this topic very seriously.”

Members of the VHA [National Social Work Program](#), VHA Assault and Harassment Prevention Office, and VHA [National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships](#) (HAP), are integral to carrying out the objectives of White Ribbon VA. This partnership is a platform for individuals to be part of the solution in creating a proactive positive culture where all feel safe and respected. It also adds to services provided by VA through the [Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program](#) (IPVAP).

“The most meaningful part of the partnership for me personally is the genuine commitment from each of

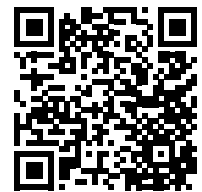
the partners to promote a proactive culture where all people are treated with dignity and respect, and [are] truly standing up to stop harassment and sexual assault from each of our respective organizations and collectively,” said Ms. Jackson.

In April, representatives from White Ribbon USA, NASW, and VA jointly conducted extensive outreach to engage a wide audience and participated in a national [Facebook Live town hall](#). Like these representatives, Veterans also supported the effort by sharing about their commitment to the pledge.

“Earlier this year I participated in a women Veterans panel at the [Disabled American Veterans](#) (DAV) [conference](#),” said Ms. Jackson. “I was greeted by three male Veterans who were sporting their white ribbons. They shared with me that they had taken the White Ribbon VA pledge back in their home state of Wisconsin and were proudly promoting White Ribbon VA with other Veterans, both male and female.”

Join the mission and take the pledge today. The pledge is simple: “I, [state your name], pledge to never commit, excuse, or stay [silent](#) about sexual harassment, sexual assault, or domestic violence against others.”

Document your pledge, here: whiteribbonusa.org/whiteribbon-va-pledge.



IPVAP is committed to helping Veterans, their partners, and VA staff impacted by intimate partner violence (IPV). Help is available if you or someone you know could be experiencing and/or using IPV. Please visit this site for resources: socialwork.va.gov/IPV/VETERANS_PARTNERS/WhatCanIDo/Concerned.asp.

Read more about HAP partnerships at va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships.asp.



Community organizations help connect Veteran to food, resources during the pandemic

In New York City, community organizations are helping the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) ensure no Veteran is left behind during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The [Staten Island Performing Provider System](#) (SIPPS) is a network of 70 local organizations dedicated to improving health care in the borough, including by developing a borough-wide Veteran suicide prevention program. SIPPS also joined the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA's) new [Veteran Sponsorship Partnership Network](#) (VSPN) initiative as a [Community Integration Coordinator](#) (CIC) to pair Service members leaving the military with local volunteers who can help them navigate the return to civilian life.

CICs like SIPPS are an integral part of the VSPN because they can draw on their unique community connections to help Veterans access needed resources like affordable housing and access to nutritious food. One of SIPPS' partners is the Community Health Action of Staten Island (CHASI), which delivers food to Veterans in need.

Vietnam Veteran and lifelong Staten Island resident Franchot Lee is one such Veteran. His experience with



A 1967 picture of Franchot Lee (*right*) being awarded his 23rd medal by a U.S. Army colonel.

CHASI and SIPPS is an example of the kind of help that CICs can provide Veterans as the VSPN grows.

Lee served in the U.S. Army from 1963 to 1967 and was awarded several medals. "I remember the colonel told me he was getting tired of me," he joked about the 1967 picture of the colonel awarding him his 23rd medal.

Lee returned home to a different battle, this time with his health as he grappled with his experiences during the war and a difficult transition home during anti-war protests. "I guess it pushed me [...] towards PTSD and it took a long time with it to get myself adjusted," said Lee, who later connected with VA counseling through his local medical center. "You know, they improved my life."

When COVID-19 began, Lee and his wife were dealt another blow. Lee was diagnosed with cancer and he and his wife have had to remain extremely isolated for his safety, making it difficult to do daily activities like grocery shopping.

Access to nutritious food is a vital influence on Veterans' health, also known as a [social determinant of health](#). A neighbor connected Lee to SIPPS' network where their partner organization CHASI was able to arrange for volunteers to deliver frozen meats, canned goods, fresh vegetables, and pandemic essentials like masks and weekly wellness checks.

"One of the nice things about it is not only getting the food, but it's just somebody coming by and they stop and talk to you," said Lee. "The volunteers are kind of cool [...]."

SIPPS is one of more than a dozen CICs in the VSPN that will help match new Veterans with local sponsors in the hope that Service members returning home have a smoother transition to civilian life than Lee did. Organizations like the [Expiration Term of Service Sponsorship Program \(ETS-SP\)](#) are connecting transitioning Service members with locals who volunteer to guide their transition via CICs and giving tips about community and VA resources.

And in the meantime, SIPPS will continue its pre-existing work with Staten Island partners like CHASI to continue helping Veterans access nutritious food and other resources.

"Veterans should make use of what the VA and groups like this are offering," said Lee.

How one Veteran's mission helped more Veterans connect to the Suicide Prevention Hotline

A new three-digit suicide prevention hotline number for Veterans will soon roll out, thanks in part to a dedicated Veteran advocate.

By July 16, 2022, all Americans will be able [to dial](#) or [text](#) 988 to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Veteran callers can press 1 to reach the [Veterans Crisis Line](#), which is staffed by operators specially trained in helping Veterans of all ages and circumstances irrespective of enrollment status.

"That's the biggest gift of the journey," said Air Force Veteran Bob Goble. "That by doing something for Veterans, we've been able to help everyone in our community."

This new, shorter number for the hotline is the culmination of several years' worth of advocacy, notably from Goble.

Goble served in the Air Force from 1980-1986 in North Carolina and Japan and now works as a quality operator in General Motors' (GM) Toledo Transmission Plant. For the past seven years, he's been on a mission to make it as easy



Bob Goble

for Americans, and especially Veterans, to call the suicide prevention hotline as it is to dial 911.

It began on a visit to Washington, D.C. when Goble learned more about the [risks and prevalence](#) of suicide among Veterans. "And I thought, what are we doing?" he said. "And why aren't we doing more?"

He first wanted to post a 10-digit hotline number on highway billboards. His coworkers and his son suggested a three-digit number instead, kicking off what he jokes was "selling popcorn"—going door to door to politicians to drum up support for this simplified hotline number.

He met with Michigan's state Rep. Adam Zemke, D-55, and U.S. Reps. Debbie Dingel, D-12, and Tim Walberg, R-7. He also met with U.S. Sens. Gary Peters, D-M.I., Sherrod Brown, D-O.H., and Richard Durbin, D-I.L.

"I'd go to coffee hour," he said. "I would go to political rallies and other events of elected officials and ask them what they could do to help."

He shared his idea with GM leadership and, through them, connected with OnStar leadership. OnStar, a GM subsidiary, [formed a partnership](#) with VHA in 2020 to connect Veterans experiencing a mental health crisis with the Veterans Crisis Line via key OnStar safety services when in a GM car with an active OnStar subscription and via the Guardian app. OnStar leadership introduced Goble to VHA's National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP). HAP staff met with Goble and helped raise awareness of his efforts with other VA offices.

"The staff of OnStar would respond and be helpful to me throughout the whole process," Goble said, crediting them with helping him find opportunities to "sell popcorn."

The federal government [signed legislation](#) creating the three-digit hotline number in October 2020, a few months after the Federal Communications Commission approved the 988 number. During that time, Goble searched Facebook for an Air Force friend. He wanted help finding one of the Lockheed C-130 Hercules aircraft they used to work on together. But his friend's ex-wife soon reached out to him.

"And she asked me if I heard about Perry," said Goble. "And I said no, and she told me that Perry had taken his own life and died by suicide."

Goble later found one of the Hercules aircraft at

Suicide Prevention Hotline continued on p 9

How an innovative PTSD treatment helped one Veteran manage PTSD from combat and military sexual trauma

For years, Maria Theresa Alcazar carried pain in the back of her neck, shoulders, and jaw. She was argumentative, depressed, couldn't sleep, and couldn't work.

"It was a super highly stressed-out muscle tension that at the time I just thought was probably normal," she said. That changed when she sought help for treating PTSD, undergoing an innovative treatment—stellate ganglion block (SGB).

Alcazar joined the U.S. Navy in 2002 and served on a nuclear warship that saw combat responding to 9/11. She was one of few women of the thousands of Service members on the warship and experienced sexual trauma, which had a "profound effect" on her life.



"I think that experience alone warped my thinking," she said. "I didn't trust any system. I didn't trust anybody."

Currently, individuals with PTSD are strongly encouraged to engage in [evidence-based treatment for PTSD](#) like Cognitive Processing Therapy, Prolonged Exposure, and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). For Veterans who haven't benefitted from standard treatments, other approaches such as SGB might be considered.

The [SGB procedure](#) involves injecting an anesthetic medication near a bundle of nerves in the neck known as the stellate ganglion. It is not known how SGB might help patients with PTSD, but it may address the hyperarousal, "fight or flight" reactions people with PTSD experience.

Alcazar sought help from her local VA medical center and experienced some improvement with treatment—but she was still struggling. She was then offered the SGB procedure but was initially "scared out of it" by the worry of what would happen to her kids

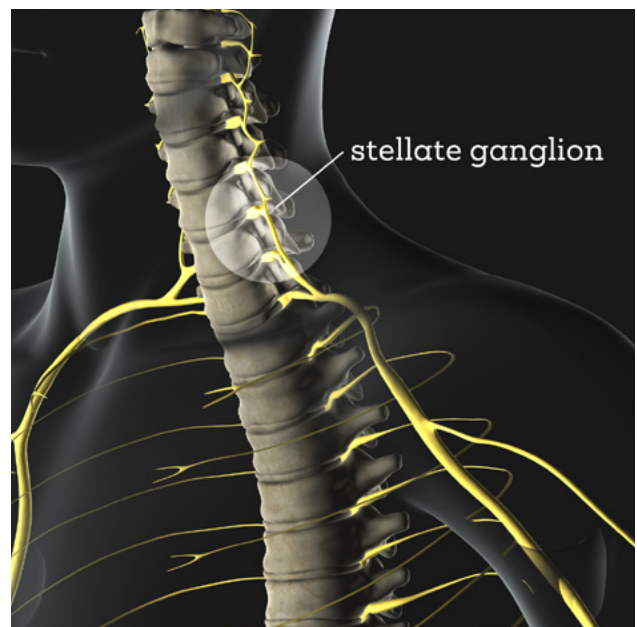
if, as a single mom, she was injured. Hearing positive stories from other Veterans changed her mind, and she underwent SGB in 2020.

After SGB, Alcazar felt a calming "whooshing" sensation from her neck to arms. "I felt really relaxed. I didn't feel any jitters," she said. "I didn't feel any tension. It was just amazing. I couldn't believe it." Other Veterans [have described](#) similar feelings of immediate relief after the SGB procedure.

Alcazar has had three SGB procedures since 2020 with stress and pain relief lasting for weeks in between. She has continued with psychotherapy and began acupuncture treatment at VA after her second SGB.

"It just seemed to be lasting longer," she said of the relief from the SGB procedure when paired with DBT and her weekly acupuncture treatments.

At the [SGB for PTSD Innovation Program](#) (SPIP) at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System, clinicians have performed SGB for 178 Veterans with PTSD since 2017, with nearly half of those patients being treated in the past two years. SPIP is designed to be a comprehensive Veteran-centric program where Veterans who receive SGB are offered



follow-up treatment with trauma-focused psychotherapy, biofeedback, acupuncture, or a combination. The SPIP is one example of how VA is pioneering new ways to work with Veterans to find the combination of treatments that work best for them.

While there are promising findings, more research is needed to fully understand the short- and long-term outcomes on PTSD symptoms, especially across diverse populations of Veterans. It will be important to know how safe SGB is over time. VA is committed to the [continued study](#) of SGB as a potential treatment for PTSD.

[Since 2017](#), VHA's National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) has collaborated with clinicians at the SPIP as part of HAP's mission to advance the health and wellbeing of Veterans through the exploration of innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies.

Today, Alcazar is feeling better and repairing her relationship with members of her family. Her oldest child recently enlisted in the Navy, triggering anxiety for her and causing friction between them.

"After the SGB block, it allowed me to enjoy at least the month or two that I had before he left to boot camp," she said. "That allowed me to realize that this was his future wasn't going to be my experience."

To learn more about the SGB procedure, check out this fact sheet: va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/docs/SGBforPTSD_508.pdf.

Suicide Prevention Hotline *continued from p 7*



AIRMAN 1ST CLASS KATHLEEN D. BRYANT

The tail number of the Hercules aircraft at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia is 988. U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Christopher Still, 23d Equipment Maintenance Squadron maintenance journeyman, is in the process of reapplying the tail number.

Moody Air Force Base in Georgia. Its tail number happened to read 988—the same as the three-digit suicide prevention number Goble advocated for.

"I don't believe any of this stuff is coincidental," he said of what that moment meant for him and his advocacy for Veteran suicide prevention. "I think it all happens for a reason."

To learn more about OnStar, visit onstar.com/us/en/articles/tips/helping-hand-for-veterans.

The OnStar partnership with VHA is facilitated by HAP. For more information on HAP's initiatives and partnerships, please visit: va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/updates.asp.

VCPs continue to meet the needs of Veterans with VA and community partner support

Over the past year, [Veteran Community Partnerships](#) (VCPs) across the country helped [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#) (VA) and community partners develop personalized options for Veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors. Many VCPs pivoted to virtual meetings due to the coronavirus pandemic but continued to schedule events and meetings for Veterans through online platforms or drive-through events. They also developed COVID-19 resources for their local communities.

In addition to adapting to the ever-changing digital environment, the VCP initiative expanded with 19 new locations and plans to have 21 more by the following fiscal year. These new additions brought the active VCP count to 53 locations with 432 VA staff and 1,019 community partners.

VCPs are collaborations—and each is part of the larger [Veterans Health Administration](#) (VHA) VCP initiative—that bring together community leaders, some of whom are Veterans, and community organizations with [VA Medical Center](#) (VAMC) programs to help Veterans access health care and supportive services at VA and beyond. The VCP

initiative is a joint project of the [VHA Geriatrics and Extended Care](#), [National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships](#) (HAP), and other VHA offices, including [Rural Health](#) (ORH), [Care Management and Social Work](#) (CM/SW), [Caregiver Support](#), and [Mental Health and Suicide Prevention](#) (OMHSP). The [Center for Development and Civic Engagement](#) (CDCE) also contributes to VCP success. VHA plans to establish a VCP at every VAMC by September 2024, with an emphasis on [expanding use of home and community based services](#), [modernizing healthy aging](#), increasing use of technology and fostering expertise in geriatrics. To learn more, contact the [VCP leadership team](#).

Below are key VCP initiative accomplishments from FY21:

- The Memphis VCP met with one of the most in-demand nursing and rehabilitation facilities in the county, Allen Morgan Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, known for providing excellent care to Veterans. The group, comprised of hospice providers, VA staff, and nursing home employees, discussed ways to improve care

53 ACTIVE SITES **19 NEW SITES IN 2021**

2,836 VETERANS of **7,386** TOTAL attended **96** VCP EVENTS

2021
HIGHLIGHTS

RESOURCES
distributed to

4,059 agencies &
1,238 Veterans, families and caregivers

coordination for Veterans needing hospice care in the nursing home.

- Prior to the meeting, VA had only three to four residents in the facility. Since completion of the meeting, the number of VA residents has increased by 400%. Overall, the meeting improved communication between the parties, which led to developing rapport and trust.
- During a Stand Down event, the Coatesville VCP helped a Vietnam Veteran get hearing aids through VA, helped another with legal services, and provided a third with food from the local food bank.
- Following a presentation to the Sacramento VCP on military sexual trauma (MST), members reported they will be encouraging their agencies to add screening questions for MST into their intake assessments and reaching out to the MST coordinator with any questions on cases that may arise in the future.

- A VA hospice social worker reached out to the Philadelphia VCP and expressed need in finding a bereavement counselor who spoke Spanish. VCP staff reached out to community partners and received so many responses from hospice agencies that they not only connected the family to a Spanish-speaking bereavement counselor but also to many other community resources and services to support them.

Dr. Jamie Davis, psychologist and HAP health systems specialist, is the HAP collaborations lead for the VCP initiative. She said she was proud of the work VCPs have done over the past year.

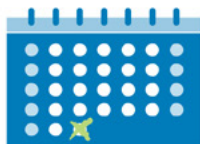
“The information above highlights only a portion of the incredible work VCPs do,” Dr. Davis said. “VCPs’ useful and innovative approaches to establish and nurture community partnerships help bring more Veterans access to care, benefits, and services from VA and community partners.”

To learn more about VCPs, visit: va.gov/healthpartnerships/vcp.asp.

Veteran Community Partnerships

- ☆ Develop relationships
- ☆ Improve access to care, services and benefits
- ☆ Promote seamless transitions
- ☆ Educate community agencies and VA providers
- ☆ Support caregivers and families
- ☆ Measure results via shared reporting

29
AGENCIES
*reported as
age-friendly*



Goal to TRAIN all VISNS by 2024

2021
HIGHLIGHTS

Heroes Foundation partnership's seasonal giving aims to spread cheer and awareness

The [Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation](#) (Heroes Foundation), a [Veterans Health Administration](#) (VHA) partner, is working to bring holiday cheer to Veterans and their families.

VHA [recently formed](#) a partnership with the Heroes Foundation to help create [more hiring opportunities](#) for Veterans and transitioning Service members by facilitating events like job fairs and educating employers about U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) resources and improving Veteran health literacy. As part of this collaboration, the Heroes Foundation seeks to support Veteran communities together with VHA and local companies. One way the Heroes Foundation does this is with seasonal giving.

"I know the pandemic hit hard," said Heroes Foundation CEO and President Chris Montoya. "For a while, it was looking pretty bleak."

Unemployment rose to [11.9%](#) in April 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic led to widespread job losses. Unemployment rates have since [fallen](#). Many Veterans, Service members, and their families still face hardship—including [hunger](#).

The organization partners with VHA to identify Veterans who may be unable to afford their own family Christmas dinner. The Heroes Foundation plans to collaborate with local restaurants and companies that can donate support for Christmas dinners to Veterans, especially those experiencing homelessness.

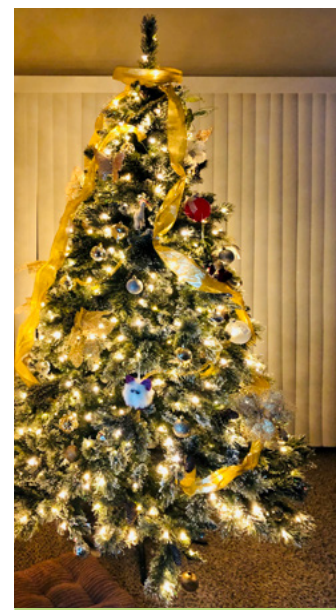
This year, the Heroes Foundation is working with the VA North Texas Healthcare System to identify Veteran and Gold Star families who need help during the 2021-2022 winter holiday season. The Heroes Foundation will help raise donations and gifts for needy families.

The Heroes Foundation's seasonal giving also adds to VA's existing resources and support for Veterans and their families who may struggle with posttraumatic stress disorder ([PTSD](#)), [substance abuse](#), [homelessness](#), among other concerns during the holidays.

Montoya said extra money the Heroes Foundation collects this year will go towards toys for children via the North Texas health system Children's Health and the Dallas Child Advocacy Center, including children of military families. The Heroes Foundation will also donate Christmas trees to military families via their partnership with the Sysco Corporation.

VHA's partnership with the Heroes Foundation augments VA's existing [employment resources](#) for Veterans, including the [Transition Assistance Program](#) (TAP), the [Veteran Readiness and Employment](#) program, and [Compensated Work Therapy](#).

Montoya said he hopes that this work can raise awareness about the companies committed to hiring and retaining Veterans, transitioning Service members, and their spouses and VA resources available to help Veterans and their families, so the partnership can "reach someone who needs it."



A Christmas tree donated to a Veteran family in 2020.

To learn more about Heroes Foundation, visit [dsmhf.org](#).

The Heroes Foundation partnership with VHA was facilitated by VHA's National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP). For more information on HAP's initiatives and partnerships, please visit: [va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/updates.asp](#).

