



**VA** | U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# 2022

National Center  
for Healthcare  
Advancement  
and Partnerships

**PUBLIC  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**

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**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
National Center for Healthcare  
Advancement and Partnerships

# Letter from Dr. Tracy Weistreich, Nurse Executive for HAP



The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) has continued to serve as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community level and advances the health and well-being of Veterans through exploration of innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies. VHA is the largest integrated health care system in the country, serving nine million enrolled Veterans. HAP has continued to develop, expand, and explore relationships that will result in augmented services to the Veterans whom the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) serves and reach those Veterans who do not receive their care through VA. HAP, and the VHA Office of Discovery, Education, and Affiliate Networks (DEAN) employees remain committed to Veteran-centric care and services. It's been a rewarding, demanding time for the HAP team as the nation remains challenged with the pandemic, the impact of inflation on Veterans and community partners, and the prospect of implementing positive legislative changes that will enhance benefits for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

During this past year, HAP updated the Strategic Goals and Objectives, which are on page 5. These are built on foundational principles including the High Reliability Organization (HRO) concept; Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access/Accessibility (IDEA); and VA's Core Values: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, Excellence (I CARE). HAP is aligned with VA, which also released its [2022-2028 Strategic Plan](#), and the [2022-2025 VHA Long Range Plan Framework](#) this year.

Throughout this annual report there are examples of how HAP worked as an office under DEAN to address the challenges facing Veterans as the COVID-19 pandemic and other health emergencies continue to evolve; how HAP keeps IDEA, HRO, and I CARE in sight as it supports the creation and implementation of health care innovations and strategic partnerships; and how these guiding principles are put into practice.

HAP recognizes that partnerships require the commitment, passion, and expertise of VHA employees across the enterprise from the front lines to program offices. To recognize the amazing innovative work being done to meet the needs of Veterans in the communities in which they live, work, learn, age, and play, HAP is proud to host the Under Secretary for Health's annual VHA National Community Partnership Challenge [page 13]. The theme changes every year, and the focus is on sharing the best practices to enable spread across the health care system. Each year, the Challenge includes elements of I CARE and IDEA [page 5] and the outcomes for Veterans across the social determinants of health (SDOH) [page 14].

HAP is intentional in the sharing of Veteran stories and the work accomplished by VHA and nongovernmental strategic partners and stakeholders on behalf of Veterans. These stories allow more Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors to learn about the resources available through VHA and the partnerships to meet the unique needs, challenges, and priorities of the Veteran population [page 14].

As an Army Nurse Corps Veteran, the Nurse Executive of HAP, and a VHA employee for more than 23 years, it is my honor to share with you the incredible stories of hope, accomplishments, passion, commitment, and dedication of the VHA employees who have the honor and privilege to serve Veterans every day. I hope you'll join the HAP team in celebrating the wins for Veterans, in appreciating the advancements everyone at VA and VHA make each day to enhance Veterans' health and well-being, and the power of partnerships to meet the Veterans where they are and provide them with what they need.

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

# Introduction



*HAP works collaboratively and strategically to bring force-multiplying partnerships and cutting-edge health care innovations to Veterans, their family members, caregivers, and survivors.*

As the largest integrated health care system in the United States, VHA honors those who have “borne the battle” by providing all-encompassing, proactive health care services to Veterans and by being unrelenting in its mission to improve their health, well-being, and livelihoods. Partnerships facilitated by HAP augment the invaluable services already offered by VHA and VA by leveraging the resources and knowledge of nongovernmental partners who share VHA’s mission, vision, and passion for serving those who have served. Additionally, health care advancement initiatives (HAIs) supported by HAP amplify that most critical resource so many Veterans find through VHA: hope. Veterans who have not experienced satisfactory symptom relief or outcomes from other therapies can explore HAIs

spearheaded by forward thinkers in the VHA medical community who insist upon a high level of support for Veterans’ well-being.

To carry out this essential work, HAP—like all of VHA and VA—must work and think strategically and in concert with other offices who have the same goals. This year, HAP rolled out the HAP Strategic Goals and Objectives for 2022-2027, which are aligned with the larger VA and VHA strategic goals and priorities. HAP is an affiliated office within DEAN. DEAN’s mission is to transform health care for Veterans and the nation through innovation, training, research, and partnerships. HAP and other DEAN program offices, which include the Office of Academic Affiliations, Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning, and Office of Research and Development, work in sync to proactively meet some of health care’s most formidable challenges for Veterans.

*“VHA’s capabilities are amplified and assisted by nongovernmental partners who share the same goals that address the needs of Veterans. Thus far, HAP’s partnerships have garnered solutions to housing, education, employment, food security, health care, safety and mental health needs of Veterans across the country.”*

**Shereef Elnahal, MD**  
*Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health*



## HAP's Strategic Goals and Objectives:

### *HAP is a resource*

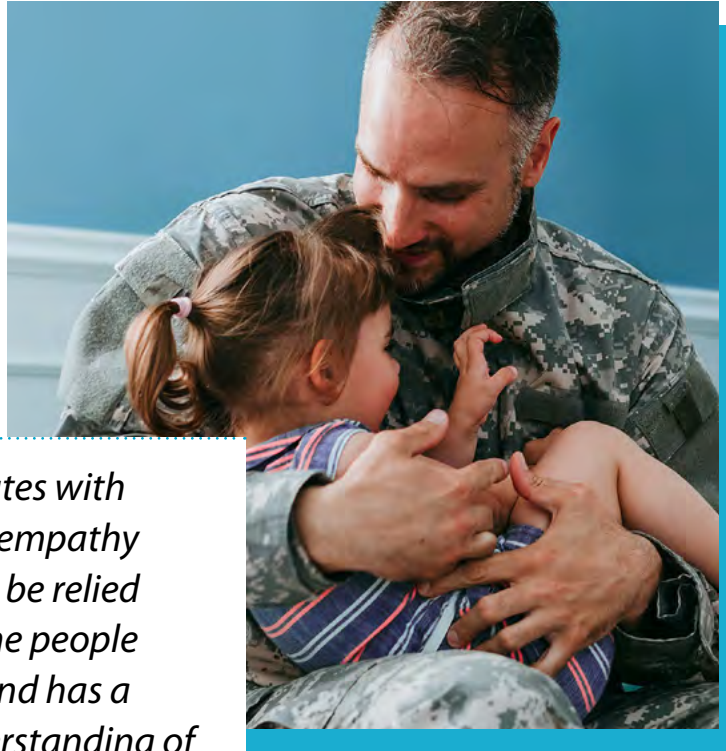
HAP serves as a trusted resource and expert on community partnerships for internal and external stakeholders, such as other VHA offices, VA medical centers (VAMC), Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN), or nongovernmental partners like those listed on page 14. HAP provides consultative services and resources to facilitate partnerships that deliver quality benefits, care, and accessible services across the SDOH—the social, economic, and physical conditions in the environments where Veterans live, work, learn, worship, play, and age. HAP also provides programmatic oversight of and subject matter expertise related to partnerships through consultation, engagement, education, and policy across VHA.

### *HAP is a catalyst*

HAP is a catalyst for the growth of effective non-monetary partnerships at the national, state, and community level. HAP increases awareness of partnership opportunities to address Veterans' needs and promote dissemination of best practices at the national, state, and community level through employee engagement, communication, and consultation.

### *HAP advances health and well-being*

HAP advances the health and well-being of Veterans through exploration of innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies. To do so, HAP collaborates with internal and external stakeholders to enhance access to services and innovation across clinical priorities, such as suicide prevention and access to positive SDOH. HAP facilitates partnerships to support HAI development resulting in direct Veteran impact, leveraging the innovation in VHA and industry.



*HAP operates with a sense of empathy for all, can be relied upon by the people it serves, and has a deep understanding of Veteran populations and VA services.*

The foundational concepts bolstering all of HAP's Strategic Goals and Objectives are the I CARE, IDEA, and HRO principles. VA and VHA serve diverse Veteran populations with unique needs, preferences, and priorities:

#### **I CARE and IDEA**

VA has established its "[I CARE](#)" core values to describe how it will accomplish its mission; I CARE is the enduring foundation supporting all interactions with Veterans, partners, and stakeholders. To meet that mission, HAP staff members, as VHA employees, center the values of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence as a guide for all interactions with Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors:

- ▶ *I care about those who have served*
- ▶ *I care about my fellow VA employees*
- ▶ *I care about choosing "the harder right instead of the easier wrong"*
- ▶ *I care about performing my duties to the very best of my abilities*

For HAP, as for VA and VHA, a critical way to demonstrate care for Veterans is centering the IDEA concept in all interactions and delivery of care and services. Inclusion, diversity, equity, and access are paramount for an office that engages nongovernmental organizations in partnerships on behalf of a Veteran population who has a breadth of life experiences, identities, cultures, and backgrounds.

HAP's partnerships and HAIs embrace IDEA through service to Veterans to advance an inclusive environment that values and supports the diverse communities and cultivates equitable access to care, benefits, and services for all. Partnerships, which include varied platforms in person and through virtual offerings, reach Veterans where they are to ensure they receive access to resources and health care that support positive outcomes related to the SDOH, which are correlated with reduced suicide risk. Activities offered by partners free of charge to Veterans, and often in the very communities where they live, means that Veterans with limited resources can still access the partnerships' benefits, education, outreach, and services.

HAP's support for the annual VHA National Community Partnership Challenge includes IDEA principles. As noted earlier, the theme varies each year and the 2022 VHA Challenge theme was "G.R.O.W.," which focused on partnerships that are **Goal-oriented**, **Resilient**, create **Opportunities**, and improve the **Well-being** of Veterans. One of the qualifications for submissions was that partnerships must meet Veterans' needs while honoring the IDEA concept, SDOH needs, and I CARE values. For more on this year's Challenge, see page 13.

Many VA offices HAP is associated with have been focusing on IDEA efforts in the past fiscal year. The [Veteran Community Partnerships \(VCP\) initiative](#), which HAP supports along with other VHA offices, hosted [its first IDEA training](#) this spring. Learn more about VCP activities on page 10. HAP's parent office, DEAN, centered IDEA in its work [this past fiscal year](#) as well: DEAN senior leaders stood up an ad hoc working group on IDEA in winter 2021, co-led by HAP's Nurse Executive. DEAN conducted a Minority Summit that brought together more than 500 Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

### **HRO**

HAP this past year continued to meet the standards of an HRO; as part of its transformational modernization, VHA has [been on a journey](#) to become an HRO [since 2019](#). HROs are organizations that work in high-hazard, complex contexts without catastrophic accidents or serious failures for extended time periods. According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, "the concept of high reliability is attractive for health care, due to the complexity of operations and the risk [when failures occur]." VHA centralizes the HRO concept as a strategic initiative, as 9 million enrolled Veterans rely on VHA for high-quality health care.

*"HAP's exceptional ability to forge partnerships that extend services and innovations to Veterans is essential to ensuring high-quality care. In addition to bridging critical gaps in services, these partnerships go to Veterans where they are, regardless of VA healthcare eligibility or enrollment status, expanding access and enhancing care. The pages to follow document this outstanding and inspiring work."*

**—Dr. Carolyn Clancy**  
Assistant Under Secretary for DEAN

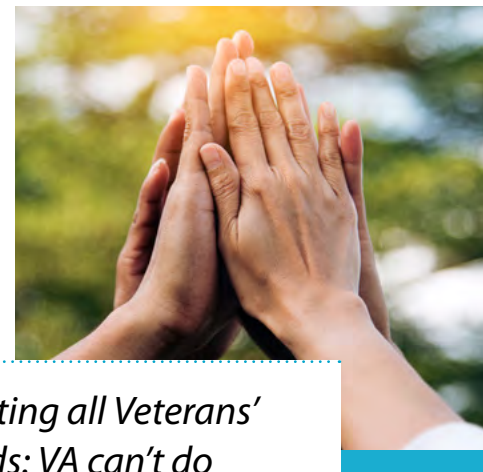


HAP is especially focused on all five of the HRO principles: deference to expertise, commitment to resilience, sensitivity to operations, reluctance to simplify, and preoccupation with failure. HAP partnerships and HALs defer to the knowledge and experience of stakeholders within VHA and in communities throughout the nation. Stakeholders in the communities where Veterans live, worship, age, work, and play are the people who have the deep expertise necessary to bring Veterans and their communities the support they need. Many HAP partners, such as those on page 14, are organizations or agencies with expertise relevant to whatever situation the partnership aims to address. Front-line employees have the firsthand knowledge of what Veterans need and want and, often, how to ensure they receive the care and services they need. The Challenge is one way to demonstrate both sensitivity to operations and commitment to resilience.

The preoccupation with failure fuels the desire to leverage best practices from within VHA and industry and spread them across the enterprise.

Another example of "commitment to resilience" is exemplified by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and how VHA, HAP, and nongovernmental and community partners have had to adapt, adjust operations, and manage continuity of service despite the pandemic's impact. In the face of COVID, key internal and external stakeholders, including HAP staff members, have remained stewards of exceptional health care resources and support for Veteran communities. This has been demonstrated through pivoting to online offerings, conducting drive-through services, or helping Veterans get vaccinated. HAP recognizes the importance of mirroring the ingenuity, fortitude, and creativity demonstrated by Veterans and employees to meet the needs of those who have served.





*VHA is—and must be—nimble, steadfast, and responsive in the face of events that affect the lives of Veterans everywhere.*

The pandemic continues to test the mettle of America’s largest integrated health care system in different ways. The creation and rollout of vaccines, the shifts to online workspaces and service offerings in many cases, and the knowledge available about transmission and recovery have all changed the landscape of this pandemic over the last two years. HAP worked this past year, just as it has worked since 2020, alongside and within other VHA offices, the VAMC, and VISN to develop, share, and explore innovative ways to serve Veterans as the pandemic remains a challenge in the past, present, and future.

VA’s [Fourth Mission](#)—to improve the nation’s preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters—presented an opportunity to develop plans and take actions to ensure continued services to Veterans; to support national, state, and local emergency management; and to support public health, safety, and homeland security efforts through services available within DEAN. Offices

under the DEAN umbrella have been studying the potential impacts of “long COVID” (which refers to when people have recovered to the acute stage of COVID but who continue to have debilitating symptoms), researching 3D-printed nasal swaps for COVID tests, and leveraging DEAN’s scientific technology capabilities to investigate new COVID treatments.

Dr. Carolyn Clancy, assistant under secretary for health for DEAN, [said in March](#) that VA researchers are investigating the administration’s electronic health record data, and many facilities have set up “long COVID programs.” According to Dr. Clancy, some 615,000 Veterans have contracted COVID and 4-7% of those have developed long COVID. VA, she said, is focusing on responding to those Veterans’ symptoms and “keeping a close eye on cardiac and mental health symptoms.”

As an office within DEAN, HAP is tasked with transforming health care for Veterans through formation of strategic partnerships and HAIs. Other DEAN offices are doing that through targeted research in labs, some are doing it through academic research or clinical trials, and still others by leveraging innovation and simulation to promote best practices in care delivery.

*Meeting all Veterans’ needs: VA can’t do everything for everyone and can’t do it alone.*

VA provides benefits and services to Veterans that are authorized through regulations and laws. These provide a host of capabilities for VA and VHA to meet the needs of Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors in a prescribed way. To meet Veterans’ needs not included in these laws and regulations, VHA engages in strategic nonmonetary public-private partnerships. These partnerships augment care and services, serving as force multipliers. For example, VHA can assist a homeless Veteran with finding housing. However, furnishings are outside the authority. Therefore, strategic partners can help turn the housing into a home that meets the basic and extended necessities for daily living.

There are approximately 21 million Veterans in the United States and nine million of those receive their care through VA. For those who opt not or are ineligible to receive their care through VA, public-private partnerships offer education, outreach, and services VA is unable to provide. HAP serves as the subject matter expert for VHA and external stakeholders on the development, implementation, and evaluation of public-private partnerships to serve all Veterans, irrespective of enrollment or eligibility. Partnerships allow VA to serve more Veterans in more ways than VA can do alone, and expand services to families, caregivers, and survivors.

# HAP by the Numbers

During this fiscal year, HAP's work has led to the following accomplishments that support and expand VA's abilities to provide Veterans and their families with quality health care and supportive services.

## HEALTH CARE INNOVATIONS



More than **500 Veterans** benefit from health care advancement innovations



More than **50 unique Veterans** treated with the Stellate Ganglion Block (SGB) health care innovation

- ▶ 80% of Veterans diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) experienced an improvement in depression (measured by PHQ-9) with an average change of 5 points
- ▶ 73% of Veterans reported a reliable change (i.e., change not due to chance; improvement by >5 pts on PCL-5) post-treatment

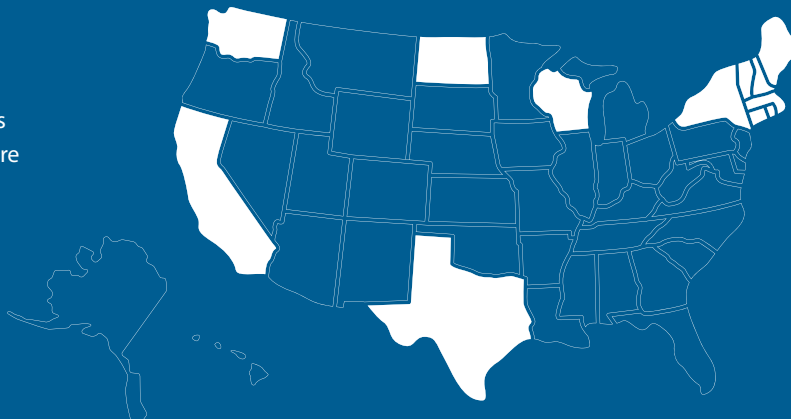


More than **420 Veterans** served by Veteran Sponsor Partnership Network (VSPN) partners

- ▶ Nearly 20 partners in the network
- ▶ More than 580 sponsors trained by VA

Health care innovations reached Veterans in communities in the following states:

- ▶ California
- ▶ Connecticut
- ▶ Maine
- ▶ Massachusetts
- ▶ New Hampshire
- ▶ New York
- ▶ North Dakota
- ▶ Rhode Island
- ▶ Texas
- ▶ Vermont
- ▶ Washington
- ▶ Wisconsin



## PARTNERSHIPS

**9 active partnerships** managed by HAP



**14 facilitated active partnerships** that are managed by other VHA program offices



Collectively, HAP partnerships addressed the following **SDOH**:

- ▶ Housing
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Employment
- ▶ Food Security
- ▶ Health Care
- ▶ Safety
- ▶ Mental Health



## COMMUNICATIONS



More than **45,000 views** of blog posts published on VA's premier blog site, VAntage Point



**17 GovDelivery bulletins** distributed



More than **36,000 total views** of the HAP website



**22 articles** appearing on VAntage Point



**5 quarterly newsletters**





# HAP Highlights: Veteran Community Partnerships (VCPs)

The Veteran Community Partnership (VCP) program connects VA with community providers and organizations to meet the needs of all Veterans. Neither VA nor community agencies alone can provide all the services a Veteran may need; robust partnerships between VA and community groups are necessary to provide the coordinated, high-quality health care that Veterans and their families deserve.

The VCP program is run under the VHA Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care and is supported by HAP and the offices of Rural Health, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Care Management and Social Work Services, Caregiver Support, and the Center for Development and Civic Engagement.

***VCP is a proven model that leads to improved access to care, services, and benefits for Veterans, their families, and caregivers.*** It is innovative, flexible, and relevant to help VAMCs and community organizations address a broad range of needs. Furthermore, the VCP model is applicable to all Veteran populations. Many VCPs specifically address issues, populations, topics, or programs such as homelessness, community reintegration, mental health, end-of-life care, caregiving, dementia, and more. This past year, the VCP initiative noted a 13% increase in new community partners from a variety of organizations. Examples include mental health, caregiver agencies, and Veteran Service Organizations.

***VCPs support Veterans, their caregivers, and families.*** The VCP model of collaboration—among Veterans, caregivers, VA staff, and community organizations—produces a coalition



WICHITA KS VETERAN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

working together to integrate knowledge and action for the combined mutual benefit of all. It continues to be a low-tech, high-touch, Veteran-centric approach to optimizing civilian and VA services for Veterans. In addition, the model is easily replicated and adapted.

The **Wichita VCP-VISN 15** drive-through resource fair for community members, including Veterans, their families, caregivers, and community agency staff.

*The stories say it all. Here's what VCPs across the U.S. have achieved this year:*

- ▶ The **Bay Pines VCP-VISN 8** sponsored a community presentation on moral injury. After the event, one Veteran said, "I have been stuck in a bad place for a long time. Now I see what work I need to do to get unstuck." This Veteran was provided with a referral to the resources he needed to take the next steps in his healing and recovery journey.
- ▶ The **Memphis VCP-VISN 9** held a meeting to discuss challenges for Veterans in their community. One concern brought forward was the inability for Veterans to get admitted to a highly sought-after long-term care facility in their community. Feeling empowered, members of the VCP gathered key stakeholders and met with leadership at the community facility. During the meeting, they discovered process issues within both the VA and the long-term care facility, which led to missed opportunities for Veteran admission. Prior to the meeting, only three Veterans had been admitted to that facility. Since the meeting, the number of Veterans admitted increased by 400%.
- ▶ The **Pittsburgh VCP-VISN 4** sponsored a community-wide presentation on Advocacy for Choice and Wellness. As a result, two agencies are incorporating VA and Medicare benefits into their programs to better serve Veterans in their respective service areas.
- ▶ The **Wichita VCP-VISN 15** held a drive-through resource fair (see photo at on page 10) for community members, including Veterans, their families, caregivers, and community agency staff. The VCP community co-chair reported that this event was so successful that community members want to offer it twice a year.

*Other VCP accomplishments this past fiscal year included:*

**196 virtual meetings.**

**96 virtual events**

including caregiver and homeless stand downs, health fairs, food drives, Yellow Ribbon and pinning ceremonies, and drive-by events.

Meetings with nearly  
**3,000 Veterans, VA staff, and community partners**

to make connections, build relationships, and receive valuable information on the available resources in their community.

An IDEA training with more than  
**100 attendees,**  
**5 national training workshops, and**  
**3 cohorts**

where new VCP co-chairs participated in mentoring programs.

*VCPs also conducted community events on a multitude of topics. This year, VCPs held:*

- 2** food distributions
- 5** stand downs
- 18** educational events
- 15** caregiver events
- 17** benefit events
- 5** enrollment events
- 9** geriatric events
- 2** Whole Health events
- 4** homeless events
- 17** mental health/suicide prevention events

To learn more about VCPs and how they empower communities to solve problems together, visit the [VCP Website](#).



# HAP Highlights: VHA National Community Partnership Challenge

Each year, HAP facilitates the Office of the Under Secretary for Health's VHA National Community Partnership Challenge to recognize successful collaborations between VHA staff and community organizations and spreads best practices across the enterprise. These nonmonetary partnerships augment VHA services to ensure the needs of all Veterans are met. The challenge celebrates the wide range of collaborative partnerships among VHA, community organizations, and the employees who identify and address Veterans' needs and gaps in services.

HAP widely publicizes the Challenge and encourages submissions to spotlight the important work partnerships accomplish for Veterans and their families. Any VHA employee can enter the competition and submit entries for partnerships they facilitate. Winners are honored in an annual ceremony and receive an award from the VHA Under Secretary for Health and the VA Secretary.

Partnerships considered for recognition are built on the foundation of IDEA. *Inclusion* and *diversity* recognize traits and characteristics that make people unique and promote connection, acceptance, and inclusion. Equity and access refer to the elimination of health disparities and availability of services for all Veterans. All VHA partnerships help VA serve an increasingly diverse community of Veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors, and other beneficiaries.

This year's theme was G.R.O.W., which stands for "Goal Oriented, Resiliency, Opportunity, Wellness." VHA employees were asked to submit entries for partnerships that exemplify a Goal-oriented approach to collaborations, build Resiliency across SDOH, create

Opportunities to increase access to care or services through an innovative approach, and improve the Well-being of Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Submissions demonstrated the growth of services to Veterans in one or more of the four theme domains:

**Goal-oriented:** The partnership demonstrates a goal-oriented approach to collaborations, including fostering Veterans' self-determination and autonomy.

**Resiliency:** The partnership demonstrates the ability to address SDOH, mental health, and/or suicide prevention in an ever-evolving environment.

**Opportunities:** The partnership addresses any gaps in care or services and demonstrates actions taken to leverage an innovative approach to address those gaps.

**Wellness:** The partnership demonstrates a deliberate approach to incorporate a Whole-Health perspective to the collaboration that reduces risk factors or increases protective factors associated with Veteran health and well-being, including suicide risk reduction.

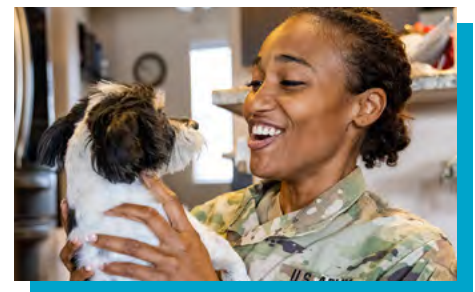
The 2022 winners were the Michael J. Crescenz VAMC partnership with Heroic Gardens; the Robert J. Dole VAMC partnership with Wichita Animal Action League, entitled "Safe Paws Alliance"; and the VA Boston Healthcare System partnership with Veterans Voice Radio Network.

**Michael J. Crescenz VAMC/Heroic Gardens:** This partnership offers nature and plant-based healing opportunities to Veterans enrolled in the program. It provides virtual gardening workshops and community-based, nature-based

walking meditation groups that empower Veterans to engage in Whole Health practices, including adding homegrown fruits, vegetables, and herbs to their diets; connecting with and broadening support systems; and engaging in mindfulness and self-care. This partnership is also a finalist in the 2022 Diffusion of Excellence VHA Shark Tank Competition for its innovative practice in the area of National Tele-Neurology Program.

**Robert J. Dole VAMC/Wichita Animal Action League:** This partnership bridges the gap for Veterans who have pet care responsibilities and no support system to care for their pets when they require inpatient care and treatment. This partnership gives Veterans an opportunity to safely board their pet and pursue care and treatment without distress.

**VA Boston Healthcare System/Veterans Voice Radio Network:** Veterans Voice Radio Network partners with the VA Boston Healthcare System and other strategic federal, state, and nonprofit agencies to broadcast and market critical military member, Veteran, and family care information at no cost. VA Boston staff members are regular guests, and the program was selected as an honoree by the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention for its work with VA Boston and others in the suicide prevention effort and for its hosting of other informational programs.



# HAP Highlights: Health Care Innovations and Partnerships

HAP's HAIs and partnerships augment the services already provided by VHA to help improve Veterans' health outcomes across the SDOH. HAP's work this past year focused specifically on the following SDOH: housing, education and employment, food security, health care, mental health, and safety. Veterans' lack of access to resources and support for the SDOH—if, for instance, they lack a safe and stable place to live, access to nutritious food, or income—is a [strong predictor of suicide risk](#). All of HAP's partnerships and HAIs are established with suicide prevention as an inherent consideration and include resources that are free and public facing for partners to promote with their networks.

Many HAP partnerships/HAIs demonstrated significant, meaningful, and data-driven improvements across the SDOH for the populations they serve:

## HOUSING

### *Veteran Sponsor Partnership Network*

The Veteran Sponsor Partnership Network (VSPN) initiative is focused on improving the experience and outcomes of military Service members transitioning into civilian life and reducing risk factors related to Veteran death by suicide, which is significantly elevated for Veterans in their first year after leaving the military. Through the VSPN initiative, the 18 VISNs and more than 18 community partners can form non-monetary partnerships to help transitioning Service members and their families access VA services and community resources including housing assistance, transportation, employment opportunities, and more.



For this initiative, HAP facilitates the development and formalization of agreements between VISNs and local, regional, and nationwide community partners. During the 2022 fiscal year, VSPN grew from 12 to 19 partners aligned with the mission of the initiative. VHA trained more than 585 sponsors and community partner sponsors served more than 425 Veterans in fiscal year 2022, approximately a 40% increase from the year before.

One example of how community partners aligned with the VSPN initiative are providing transitioning Service members with support is the Expiration Term of Service Sponsorship Program (ETS-SP). As a resource for Service members stationed in the United States and overseas,

ETS-SP provides Service members and recently separated Veterans with a digital dashboard of local resources and can pair them with a trained sponsor matched on factors that are most important to the Service member. Another is the Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN) at the LA County Department of Health in Los Angeles, California, which provides support for housing, mental health, substance use, and employment.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### *Americans for the Arts*

As consultants, HAP supported the creation and finalization of the memorandum of agreement that formalized the partnership between

Americans for the Arts and VHA. The purpose of the partnership is to increase access to the arts and humanities and enhance services for Veterans, their families, and caregivers. The primary goal of the partnership is to provide more Veterans with opportunities to experience how the arts can positively impact their health and well-being.



MIKE STRASSER/FORT DRUM GARRISON/DVIDS

HAP supported this partnership, which is currently managed by VHA's Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, by leading a presentation on partnership development for representatives from community arts and humanities organizations and VHA Whole Health programs. Representatives from these programs and organizations are selected to participate with the goal of bringing the two groups together to develop partnerships that enhance services and benefits related to what is important to each individual Veteran in their healthy living journey. The presentation delivered in fiscal year 2022 was attended by 10 community partners, and 17 VAMC teams of individuals from 11 VISNs.

**Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation**

HAP leads the partnership between VHA and the Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation (HF). The goal of this partnership is to create more hiring opportunities for Veterans, transitioning Service members, and

spouses by facilitating job fairs, educating community employers about VA resources, and improving Veteran health literacy.

During fiscal year 2022, HF's and VHA's collaborative efforts resulted in multiple career fairs and hiring events that benefit Veterans and their spouses. Those events included:

- ▶ The "Hiring Red, White, and You" November 2021 hiring event hosted in collaboration with the Texas Veterans Commission and Texas Workforce Commission. Five companies participated in the event, including Service King, 7-Eleven, SYSCO, Kraft Heinz, and PrimeSource. A pre-hiring resume-writing and interviewing workshop was also held as part of the event and served more than 50 Veterans.



WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS OF CENTRAL TEXAS

- ▶ A career fair and hiring event held in March 2022 with Service King Collision Repair Centers.
- ▶ A career fair and hiring event held in April 2022 with Domino's Pizza.

To increase awareness around the partnership and how it benefits Veterans and their spouses, HAP presented on the partnership during the October 2021 VHA Public Affairs Officers call. Additionally, a presentation was held

in January 2022 to help companies and employers become more Veteran-ready in their hiring and retention efforts. VA Deputy Chief Veterans Experience Officer Barbara Morton participated in the panel for the presentation to companies and employers.

HF developed an informational flyer that HAP made available to VAMCs, Veteran Community Partnerships (VCPs), Community Veteran Engagement Boards, and other VA programs. The announcement was also shared through LinkedIn and via VetResources as part of the broader efforts to reach the Veteran community. Employment-related resources and job openings continue to be shared with VetResources.

This partnership helped Veterans, transitioning Service members, and spouses secure employment. The partnership, along with local and national companies, provided more than 50 Veterans and their families Thanksgiving dinners, Christmas trees, children's gifts, and assistance with paying bills.

**Salesforce**

HAP plays an active role in the VHA-Salesforce partnership developed in 2020 to support Veterans' and military Service members' career goals in the civilian workforce. Through the partnership, VHA and the Salesforce Military community coordinate to better connect Veterans, Service members, and their spouses with skill development, career advancement, and employment resources. Through the







partnership, Salesforce Military has also developed online guides on VA benefits and mental health resiliency resources, including direct links to information about suicide prevention and how Veterans, their spouses, and employers can reduce the risk for suicide in their homes, businesses, and communities. During fiscal year 2022, more than 45,000 Veterans and their families were served, supported, or helped through the partnership with Salesforce.

This year, VHA helped connect 1,900 Veterans and eligible enrollees to Salesforce Military's free resources. Within this group, 76 have completed the training, 24 certifications have been obtained, 17 individuals have obtained certifications, 10 are employed, and two were recently hired.

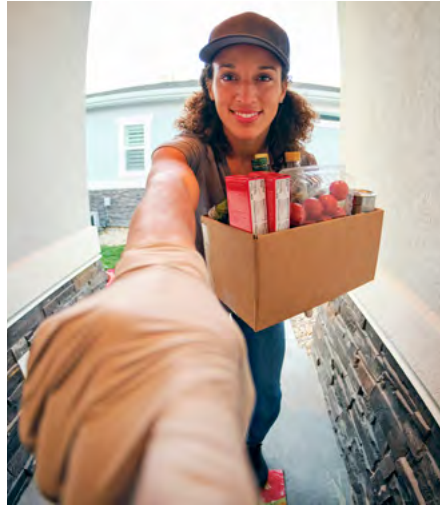
This partnership also led to the creation of the "VA Benefits for Veterans" and "Veteran Mental Health and Resiliency Resources" learning modules created with VHA as part of Salesforce Military's Trailhead learning platform. Trailhead provides a captivating, gamified learning experience for active-duty Service members, Reserve, Guard, Veterans, and military spouses interested in launching and growing a successful career in technology. Both modules are free and available to anyone, including Veterans, military spouses, and caregivers. The VA Benefits for Veterans module, which provides an overview of Veteran benefits and how to access them, was accessed by 4,100 people in fiscal year 2022. The Mental Health Resiliency Module was launched in July of 2022.

## FOOD SECURITY

### MAZON

HAP facilitated the partnership between VHA and MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, which was formed to increase awareness about the risks associated with food insecurity and ways to address it through outreach to Veterans. MAZON advocates for food security among Veterans and other groups and leads a

national effort to eliminate barriers to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for currently serving military families—both are initiatives that VHA supports.



Throughout fiscal year 2022, MAZON regularly conducted information-sharing activities alongside VHA's Ensuring Veterans Food Security Workgroup. MAZON also provided educational resources to support the development of the VHA Food Security Toolkit.

One example of this partnership's success is through the Martinsburg VA Medical Center (VAMC) in West Virginia, which donated more than 80,000 pounds of food to more than 2,500 Veterans in need thanks to donations received from local organizations and partners.

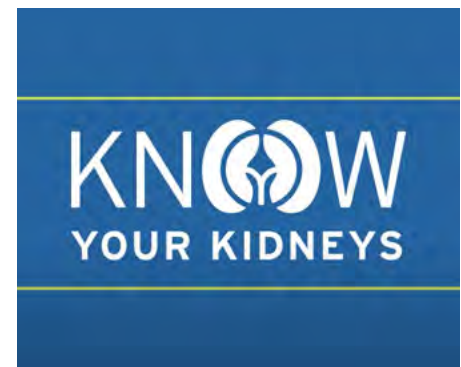
MAZON also worked to counteract the stigma and misinformation associated with SNAP by helping to amplify the stories of Veterans who utilize the program on the "This is Hunger" project. Together, VHA and MAZON created a brochure about food insecurity and SNAP that is targeted to Veterans. MAZON also supported the creation of an online training course in partnership with the PsychArmor Institute—a VA partner that helps support VCPs and the Veteran Crisis Line—to help providers who work with Veterans offer solutions to food insecurity.

## HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY

### American Kidney Fund

The HAP-supported partnership between VHA and the American Kidney Fund (AKF) focuses on education, screenings, and mental and emotional support for those who suffer from the disease, which affects about one in six Veterans. This partnership will add to the support and resources VA and VHA already offer to Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. According to AKF, there are currently approximately 500,000 Veterans diagnosed with chronic kidney disease (CKD), and that number is likely to increase by 30,000 people next year. Nearly 1,000 Veterans have used the resource materials provided by the VHA and AKF.

The partnership's "Know Your Kidneys" videos have aired more than 1,700 times on the [Veteran News Network YouTube channel](#) so far this year. Other accomplishments of the partnership this year are:



- ▶ June 2022—"Coffee Chat" between AKF President and CEO LaVarne Burton and Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services and Chief Medical Officer of VHA Dr. Erica Scavella, as part of Kidney Action Week.
- ▶ June 2022—"Veterans, Kidney Disease and Diabetes: The Mounting Mental Health Burdens of Managing Chronic Diseases," a Kidney Action Week session presented by Dr. Angela Giles.

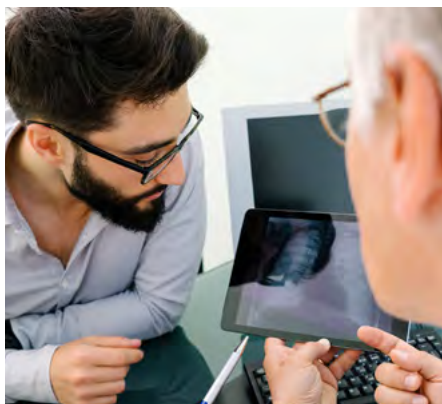
- ▶ April 2022—“[American Kidney Fund: Diversity and Inclusion for Veterans](#),” an article published in the VA Vantage Point blog that garnered more than 6,000 views.
- ▶ February 2022—“[Veterans can learn about kidney disease during National Kidney Month and National Nutrition Month](#),” an article published in HAP’s quarterly newsletter. The article highlighted AKF’s “Kidney Kitchen” resources and the “Know Your Kidney” video that had been featured on the Veterans News Network.

### **American Lung Association**

VHA and the American Lung Association have a shared goal to improve Veterans’ health and well-being through collaborative education and services for Veterans living with lung disease. This partnership helps improve the lung health and quality of life for Veterans diagnosed with lung disease and offers support to their families. The partnership helps Veterans access American Lung Association’s online resources and support groups, including the American Lung Association’s Better Breathers Clubs; it gives American Lung Association’s partners and providers an opportunity to learn more about Veteran-specific issues including suicide prevention; and it encourages VA medical centers and regional American Lung Association affiliates to create local partnerships that can elevate Veterans awareness and support.

VA diagnoses 7,700 Veterans with lung cancer each year and an estimated 900,000 remain at risk due to age, smoking, and other environmental exposures during and after military service. VA continues to conduct groundbreaking research, studies, and clinical projects on topics like the risks of e-cigarettes, tuberculosis treatment, and sleep apnea. This partnership will add to the support and resources VA and VHA already offer to Veterans, their families,

caregivers, and survivors. The American Lung Association continues to offer tobacco cessation support to Veterans, including free online registrations to Veterans and their loved ones for their “Freedom From Smoking” program. This year, the American Lung Association published three articles relevant to Veterans living with or affected by lung diseases:



- ▶ “[Protect Lung Health for Military Veterans and Contractors](#)”
- ▶ “[Veterans Living in Rural Areas Are More at Risk for COPD](#)”
- ▶ “[American Lung Association Partners with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to Improve Lung Health of Veterans](#)”

### **Arthritis Foundation**

VHA and the Arthritis Foundation (AF) collaborate to increase access to care, education, and support for Veterans diagnosed with arthritis. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 35% of Veterans have arthritis and Veterans are 25% more likely than the public to be diagnosed with the condition. The VHA provides education and care and engages in research related to arthritis within the Veteran population, and this partnership allows VHA to gain insights from research and surveys conducted by the Arthritis Foundation about Veterans’ physical and emotional needs and experience of care, including those Veterans not engaged in VA care.

The partnership has expanded support for the more than one in three military Veterans battling provider-diagnosed arthritis. The new website [arthritis.org/veteran](#) offers tips and resources that can help Veterans and Service members take control of their arthritis symptoms and daily challenges.

### **Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation (CCF)**

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) collectively refers to Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis, diseases that cause chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract and inflammation of the colon, which can lead to painful ulcers, among other symptoms. Together, VHA and the Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation (CCF) raise awareness of IBD and treatment options available. The aim of this partnership, formally established in October 2021, is to improve the quality of life for Veterans affected by chronic intestinal diseases. VHA and CCF launched a website that includes step-by-step instructions for Veterans to access treatment, links to other VA resources, and a peer support program that will be available in the coming months.



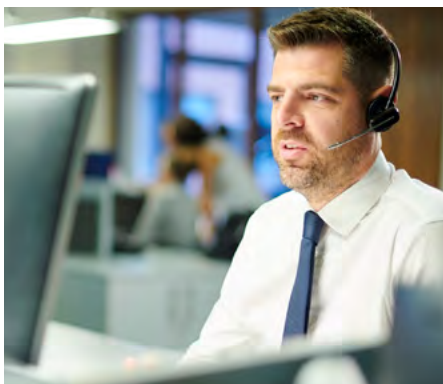
Research indicates an estimated 66,000 Veterans live with IBD. This partnership led to the launch of a Veteran-specific page on the CCF website last fall, where Veterans diagnosed with IBD and their caregivers can learn more about the disease, understand concerns about care relating to transitioning out of the military, and connect to VA resources. Among the resources linked on the

website are: information on how to find a local VA medical facility; VHA's diet, exercise, and mental health care tips for Veterans diagnosed with IBD; and a link to VA's health app, "My HealthVet," which helps Veterans securely communicate with their health care team. The Veteran webpage has since received 10,400 page visits.

### **OnStar**

HAP oversees a partnership facilitated two years ago between VHA and OnStar to enhance suicide prevention for many Veterans. Veterans, family members, caregivers, or survivors can use the in-car emergency OnStar button in General Motors vehicles (or via the Guardian app on any mobile device from anywhere) to call for crisis assistance and a warm transfer to the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL). Family members, caregivers, and survivors can also use OnStar resources to request law enforcement to check on a Veteran's safety.

In the last quarter of 2022, all 240 new OnStar emergency advisors were trained how to handle crisis calls and transfer callers to the VCL. Among OnStar's current employees, 233 emergency advisers completed a refresher training. All three call centers have added trainings about military culture, Veteran-centric education, and suicide prevention via the free, public [S.A.V.E. Training](#). VHA has also provided information about the partnership to all 171 VAMCs nationwide so VHA field staff can share it with Veterans and their communities.



This past year also marked the success of a suicide prevention project to expand access to the VCL, supported by VHA and OnStar, and championed by a Veteran and General Motors employee; HAP shared the story in the office's [winter newsletter](#).



### **Parkinson's Foundation**

HAP facilitated a partnership between VHA and the Parkinson's Foundation in 2021 to improve the health, well-being, and quality of life of Veterans living with Parkinson's disease. It supports the resources and services available through VHA.

Together, VHA and the organization work to increase Veterans' and health care providers' access to Parkinson's disease information and resources. One way that VHA and the Parkinson's Foundation achieved that over the past year was through holding two national events and five regional events for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors on topics ranging from mobility and driving to mental health.

HAP helped publish [newsletter articles](#) and Vantage Point guest blogs about the partnership in 2021 and 2022.

As part of this partnership, VA staff are educated and trained on disease management. Over the last year, VHA and the Parkinson's Foundation have teamed up to offer VA staff five trainings, collaborate on [research](#) opportunities, and administer [a survey](#) to 2,500 Veterans.

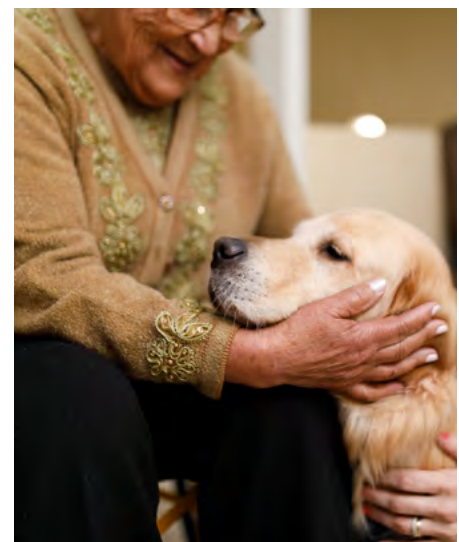
Another partnership goal is to improve Veterans' service coordination and navigation. This past year, a new protocol was created to allow VA health professionals to call a Parkinson's Foundation helpline to order bulk materials for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

In FY22, 2,355 Veterans and caregivers registered for an event, requested resources, or contacted the Parkinson's Foundation helpline.

### **Pet Partners**

[Pet Partners](#) is one of VHA's many partner organizations helping augment VA's resources to improve Veterans' overall health and well-being. Volunteer handlers and their trained animals work with Pet Partners to provide animal-assisted interventions and therapies to Veterans at several VAMCs across the U.S. [Research](#) indicates that animals help lower people's blood pressure, reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease, reduce anxiety and pain, and decrease loneliness.

Over the past year, VHA and Pet Partners expanded animal-assisted intervention services at Tomah VAMC in Wisconsin as part of the Rural Veteran Wellness and Community Engagement Initiative of the VA Office of Rural Health. These interventions will expand to two additional sites in the coming year.



HAP serves on the partnership's leadership team and published four articles in 2021 and 2022 about Veteran therapy animal teams and stories of Veterans who benefited from pet therapy via the partnership. These stories garnered more than 2,400 views on VA's premier blog site Vantage Point.

### ***Stellate Ganglion Block (SGB)***

In addition to facilitating partnerships, HAP also facilitates innovative [health care initiatives](#) for safe and ethical emerging therapies. One of these initiatives is a collaboration with the SGB for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) Innovation Program (SPIP) at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System in California.



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 exactly SGB helps some patients with PTSD symptoms, but it may address the hyperarousal, or "fight or flight," reactions people diagnosed with PTSD experience.

In FY22, the Long Beach Healthcare System treated 52 Veterans diagnosed with PTSD using the SGB procedure. These patients saw a significant reduction in PTSD symptoms after the treatments, specifically a 17-point average reduction of PTSD symptoms on participants' screening assessments. Additionally, participants experienced a five-point average reduction of depression symptoms on their screening assessments.

The SGB procedure is often used in conjunction with well-known, evidence-based PTSD therapies. This year, 20 of the Veterans treated at Long Beach also used psychotherapy and 14 Veterans also used acupuncture. HAP published a [newsletter article](#) this year about one Veteran's experiences with the SGB procedure and acupuncture and how it improved her PTSD symptoms and her relationships with her children.

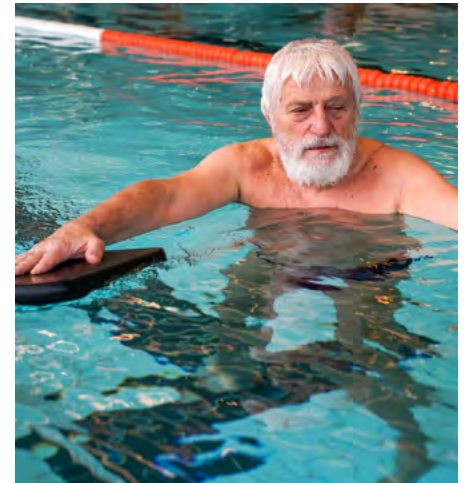
### ***White Ribbon USA and the National Association of Social Workers***

Two years ago, VHA partnered with the [National Association of Social Workers \(NASW\)](#) and [White Ribbon USA](#) to eliminate sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence across VA and surrounding communities, and to promote positive change in organizational culture.

Over the past year, HAP has published articles on [its website](#) and on [VHA's blog, Vantage Point](#), about the White Ribbon VA pledge to combat harassment and assault. This was part of a larger VA push to share the pledge and partnership mission—which included VA Deputy Secretary Donald Remy [joining a high education panel event](#) in April to discuss sexual assault and harassment and taking the pledge with 3,000 participants, and the new VA Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal, taking the pledge during his [swearing in ceremony](#).



To date, approximately 60,000 VA employees, Veterans, and interagency and community partners have taken the pledge. More than 12,000 people have taken the "White Ribbon VA: What It Means for Our VA Community" course to learn about the pledge, the partnership, and ways to eliminate sexual assault and harassment.



### ***Y-USA***

HAP facilitated a partnership in 2015 between VHA and Y-USA, the national entity that oversees YMCA facilities across the country, to provide services for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors and help connect them to needed community resources.

Through their local YMCA facilities, Veterans access volunteer opportunities and services and benefits in the areas of healthy lifestyle programming and community reintegration. During the pandemic, Y-USA launched free, online, on-demand fitness videos through its ["YMCA 360" platform](#).

Over the past year, HAP [shared how](#) YMCA facilities across the nation partnered with the VHA by hosting multiple [Mobile Vet Centers](#) (MVCs) events. These 83 MVCs nationwide offer Veterans free services and resources, such as individual counseling, VHA benefits assistance, sexual trauma counseling and referral, and more. In early 2022, 150 Veterans were assisted during a three-day event with MVCs in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



# HAP Highlights: COVID-19 and Long Covid Work

VHA has four statutory missions: educate and train health professionals; aggressively pursue advances in medicine and technology; provide health care; and improve the nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters. The [Fourth Mission](#) became more widely known as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

As the pandemic continued to affect communities this past year, HAP and stakeholders from the nonmonetary partnerships and HAIs it facilitates have continued to help Veterans and their families access on-demand COVID-19 care and information. Through this work, HAP has supported the creativity, passion, and commitment of those who serve Veterans via VHA and partner organizations.

Several of these partnerships or HAIs have adapted or expanded services to help Veterans improve their health and well-being during the pandemic, including:

- ▶ In the summer of 2021, the American Lung Association partnership began offering a free [Lung HelpLine](#) (1-800-LUNGUSA) for Veterans to ask questions about COVID-19 as part of its new official partnership with VHA. Previously, the helpline included resources for lung diseases and smoking cessation. The American Lung Association also began welcoming Veterans to access up-to-date information on COVID-19 signs and symptoms and tips to stopping the spread on its [Each Breath](#) blog.
- ▶ Another VHA partner organization, Pet Partners, has [continued to help](#) Veterans [during the pandemic](#) with its virtual and in-person animal-



STAFF SGT. SARAH MCCLANAHAN/MARYLAND NATIONAL GUARD/DVIDS

assisted therapy visits to VAMCs. While Pet Partners animal therapy teams suspended in-person visits to VAMCs during the pandemic, the availability of COVID vaccines has allowed Veterans to resume some in-person visits and benefit from the human-animal bond. Research indicates that trained therapy animals can augment Veterans' other treatments (like psychotherapy) to help improve patients' symptoms related to behavioral health disorders and substance use disorders and decrease their overall stress levels.

- ▶ The [Veteran Sponsorship Partnership Network](#) (VSPN) initiative partners VHA VISNs with community organizations to help transitioning Service members

access resources like housing, food, and education, which are key to health and well-being. One New York City community organization that worked within the VPSN [helped immunocompromised Veterans](#) by checking on them weekly and providing frozen meats, canned goods, fresh vegetables, and pandemic supply essentials like masks and weekly wellness checks.

- ▶ Finally, the theme for HAP's 2021 Community Partnership Challenge was "Adaptability in a Changing World." The Challenge considered partnerships that addressed Veterans' COVID-19 service needs, among other categories that were used to judge the 44 entries in 2021.

# HAP Highlights: Communications Reach

During fiscal year 2022, HAP implemented a communications strategy with the primary goal of increasing awareness about partnerships and health care innovations created and managed by HAP that support Veterans and their families' whole health and well-being.

To carry out the communications strategy, products were developed and published in places that reach Veterans and their families or caregivers and VA staff and partners. Those products included articles, press releases, fact sheets, brochures, infographics, newsletters, monthly bulletins, social media, website content and more.

To highlight partnership successes, health care innovations, and resources available to Veterans and their families, HAP developed:



The **HAP website** garnered more than **36,000 total views** over the course of the reporting period. The webpage with the most views was the [National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships Updates](#) page, with more than **11,700 total page views** during the reporting period. The purpose of these communication artifacts and avenues is to share the best practices to allow for adoption across the enterprise, to highlight the amazing and innovative work taking place every day by VA and VHA employees, and to demonstrate how public-private partnerships are force-multipliers to meet the needs of all Veterans, irrespective of enrollment or eligibility. HAP serves as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community level and advances the health and well-being of Veterans through exploration of innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies.



## 45 articles

**22** were published on VA's premier blog site, Vantage Point.

**23** were published on HAP's website.

Altogether, these articles garnered more than **45,000** views.



## 5 newsletters



## 17 GovDelivery bulletins

Delivered to more than **28,000 total recipients**.



## 33 supporting artifacts

Consisting of fact sheets, press releases, flyers, and brochures communicating about the various partnerships and health care initiatives led by HAP.



## 168 social media posts

Including a tweet posted by Dr. Carolyn Clancy, assistant under secretary for health for DEAN, promoting a HAP-authored blog post highlighting the partnership with the American Kidney Fund.

**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
*National Center for Healthcare  
Advancement and Partnerships*

**Veterans Health Administration**

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[va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://va.gov/healthpartnerships)

September 2022