

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Veteran Community Partnerships:

*Reimagining the future to  
serve Veterans, families, and  
caregivers*

Fiscal Year 2022  
Summary of Activities





# **VETERAN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

## **Vision**

**To ensure Veteran choice in their access to care, services, and benefits through organized VA and community partnerships.**

## **Mission**

**To empower collaborative action between VA and community partners to develop and expand Personalized options for Veterans.**

## **Leadership Team**

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## Executive Summary

**Veteran Community Partnerships (VCPs) support Veterans, their caregivers, and families.** The VCP model of collaboration – Veterans, caregivers, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) staff, and community organizations – is a coalition working together to integrate knowledge and action for the combined mutual benefit of all involved. It continues to be a low-tech, high-touch, Veteran-centric, easily replicated, and readily adapted approach to optimizing civilian and VA services for Veterans.

In FY2022, VCPs impacted their Veteran communities by:

- Hosting 255 events to educate and support Veterans, caregivers, and health care and service providers
- Conducting 399 virtual meetings
- Adding 10 new VCPs
- Increasing the number of VA community partners by 13%, including mental health agencies, caregiver agencies, and Veteran Service Organizations



## Foreword

Veteran Community Partnerships (VCPs) are coalitions of Veterans and their caregivers, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities, community health providers, organizations, and agencies working together on the common goal to facilitate connections to, and transitions among, the full continuum of care and support services in VA and the community.

VCPs began with 3 pilot sites in 2011 and have steadily expanded to 63 active sites across the country. In Fiscal Year 2022, 33 sites received VCP training, and 10 new locations opened. VCPs are located in all 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), in 30 states, and Puerto Rico.

As our communities evolve, VCP continues to develop and reimagine its activities. In FY2022, VCP provided Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) training to VCP and its members and highlighted marginalized, stigmatized, and underserved populations within the Veteran community. Following the training, VCP Co-Chairs and their members were empowered to evaluate their Veteran community and advocate for Veterans using IDEA principles.

VCPs work together in unique and diverse ways to serve Veterans and their families.

This year's summary will highlight the work done by new and established VCPs to serve Veterans, their families, and caregivers – by addressing the needs identified in their local communities.

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**“VCPs solve problems together.”**

Pittsburgh VCP Co-Chair – VISN 4

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# Overview

## History and Background

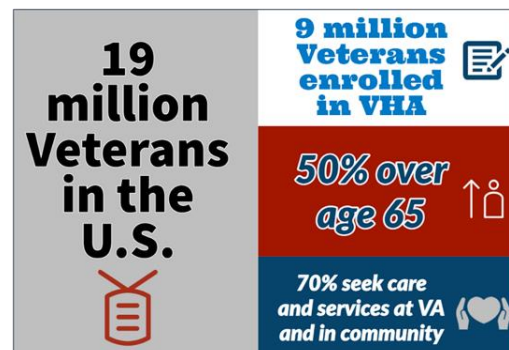
VCPs – modeled after the successful Hospice-Veteran Partnership initiative, which was started in 2009 – were piloted by the Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care for the purpose of bringing together VA staff and community partners to improve access to care, services, and benefits for Veterans, their families, and caregivers.

The Veteran Community Partnership (VCP) initiative is a joint project of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care and the National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP), with collaboration with the VHA Offices of Rural Health, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Care Management and Social Work, Caregiver Support, Whole Health, and the Center for Development and Civic Engagement.

## Rationale

While VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the U.S., streamlined coordination of access to services for Veterans can be a challenge:

- There are over 19 million Veterans in the U.S., however only 9 million Veterans are enrolled with the VA for health care<sup>1</sup>
- 6 million enrolled Veterans are over the age of 65 and older Veterans tend to have:
  - More interacting diagnoses and medications
  - More functional dependence
  - More caregiver needs and challenges



So, they are more likely to rely on services and supports from a variety of medical providers and community programs.

- 70% of VA patients over 65 use one or more non-VA health care service – VCPs work to improve the connections between providers and services

Neither VA nor community agencies alone can provide all the services a Veteran may need, so **there is a great need for strong partnerships** to be developed and nurtured among VA and community providers and organizations to provide the coordinated, quality health care that Veterans and their families deserve.

1 - Source: VHA Internal Data Source (VSCC) – 02/03/23

# VCPs in Action

## Program Expansion

VCP was included in the VA's 2022-2028 Strategic Plan with the goal of establishing a VCP at all VA facilities. VCP leadership is poised to implement this plan through 2028 with 4 strategic goals identified for FY2022.



## VCP Sites

A roster of VCPs can be found at [www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/vcp.asp](http://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/vcp.asp).

## VCP Strategic Plan

The VCP national team developed an annual work plan with 4 main goals to guide FY2022 activities.

1. Connect, partner, and train 7 new VISNs
2. Educate, support, and strengthen VCPs to foster sustainment (Local VCPs and National VCP Leadership Team)
3. Evaluate VCP expansion and its impact
4. Promote VCP to include marketing with diverse groups

## ***Key Accomplishments***

- VCP leaders modified goal 1 as VA medical centers continued to address the pandemic and related staffing concerns. While a modest amount of training was done, a pivot was made to provide training on demand and delay a push for participation to FY2023. Nonetheless, 10 new VCPs became active in FY2022.
- Goal 2 was met with incorporation of sustainment in training, mentor sessions, and new collateral materials and resources.
- Goal 3 was met via a retrospective evaluation looking at both VCP training and current status.
- Goal 4 was met with updated language and images for materials and a national Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) training that was well attended and well received. There were over 100 attendees and IDEA training will be updated and repeated in FY2023.
- VCPs partnered with 44 different agency types with the top 3 being Veteran Service Officers, aging organizations, and Home Health agencies. Within the agency types, VCPs displayed diversity within the Veteran community partnering with many different agencies to include tribal communities, military installations, colleges, and universities.
- VCPs disseminated VA and community resources to 1,353 agencies and 4,000 Veterans.
- In addition to the key accomplishments listed in the Executive Summary and depicted in the infographic on page iii, over 28,562 Veterans and 7,818 caregivers and family members met with VA staff and community partners to make connections, build relationships, and receive valuable information on the resources available in their respective communities.
- The top 3 types of events focused on:
  - Caregiver Support
  - Enrollment and Benefits
  - Mental Health



## ***Spotlight Stories – Partnering with Advocate Health Advisors***

**Lebanon VCP** has partnered with Advocate Health Advisors, which provides free assistance to Veterans navigating their health insurance and social determinants of health. In November, a Purple Heart Veteran contacted a staff member at Advocate Health Care about his Medicare Advantage options.

He receives all of his medical care at the Lebanon VA Medical Center. He was enrolled in both Medicare Part B and Medicaid. His most pressing need was new dentures as he had been gluing his current pair together for more than 10 years.

Through the office of assistance in their county, a manual correction was done, enrolling him into Medicare Part A with Medicaid covering the premium. Once he was enrolled in Medicare Part A, he was eligible to enroll in a Medicare Advantage Plan. The plan he selected has no monthly premium, so he now receives extra benefits of \$360 per quarter to use toward utilities, transportation, gas, and healthy food. Most importantly, it provides a \$7,000 allowance for dental care, which means he can get new dentures.

**Mountain Home VCP** also partnered with Advocate Health Advisors, which improved access to services for 48 Veterans – including help with health insurance, resources for durable medical equipment for the spouse of a Veteran, financial relief for utilities, and mental health services. In the last quarter of 2022, an Advocate Health Advisors staff member who is also a U.S. Air Force Veteran, assisted 15 Veterans on fixed incomes with access to groceries. In addition, Advocate Health Care and the Mountain Home VCP hosted a health fair that provided resources to thousands of local Veterans.

**“The value that VCP brings builds a bridge for Veterans and their families between community care and the VA. The benefits can complement one another when the right information is given to Veterans.”**

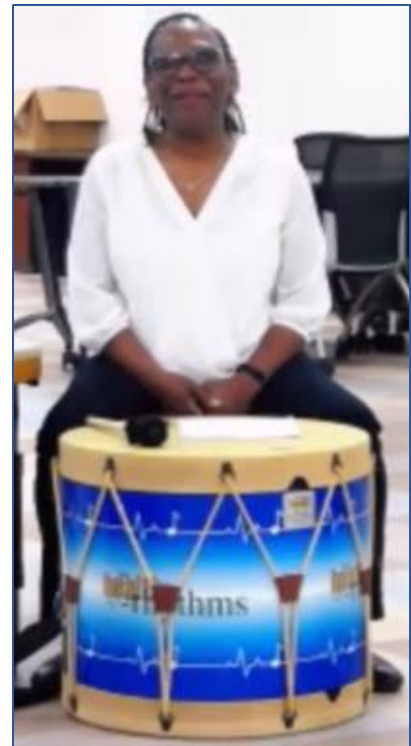
Ms. Christina Lonigro – Advocate Health Advisors and Pittsburgh VCP Member

**Pittsburgh VCP** has been collaborating with Advocate Health Advisors for several years. There, an Advocate Health Advisors staff member shared that her engagement with partners has led to Veterans with limited income, transportation challenges, and food insecurity receiving assistance from community programs. Advocate Health Advisors’ reach in Pittsburgh exceeds one hundred Veterans who have received services.

## Community Events

VCPs conduct community events on a multitude of topics to address a variety of needs. In FY2022, VCPs:

- Offered Health Fairs – with catchy names like Expos, VA Days, and Town Halls
- Held Drive-Through Resource Fairs
- Conducted Memorial, Recognition, and Pinning Ceremonies
- Organized meetings, such as a Drumming Circle and Coffee Connection Meeting for Women Veterans
- Initiated a Veterans Segment on a news talk radio station
- Posted a billboard about Suicide Awareness
- Sponsored Information and Education Sessions about:
  - Caregiver Benefits
  - Disability Rating
  - Enrollment Procedures
  - Geriatrics
  - IDEA Principles
  - Mental Health Challenges
  - Overview of Veteran Service Officers (VSOs)
  - State Agency Services
  - Programs for Homeless
  - Grief, Loss, and Isolation
  - Advance Directives
  - Suicide Prevention
  - Telehealth
  - Food Services
  - Vaccinations
  - Crisis Awareness
  - Vet Centers
  - Recreation and Whole Health
  - Alzheimer's and Dementia
  - Occupational Therapy and Assistive and Adaptive Devices
  - Social Work Services
  - Legal Information and Aging
  - Nutrition
  - Moral Injury



**Drumming Circle participant  
Kentuckiana VCP**

## Overall Successes and Challenges

Successes and challenges are shared via an online tracking tool for meetings, events, partners, and changes in practice. They are also shared during monthly VCP Co-Chair networking calls, through contact with members of the VCP Leadership Team, informational emails, news, and social media posts as well as a 6-session mentoring session series that provides coaching and support on all aspects of starting and sustaining a successful VCP (see next page to learn more about the Mentoring Sessions).

This sharing allows successes and benefits to be replicated or adapted, and challenges can often be addressed through consideration of innovative approaches or viable solutions.

Since strengthening relationships and enhancing communication on behalf of Veterans is the major goal of VCP, it is gratifying that the benefits most often cited by VCP participants are exactly those:

- Developing/strengthening relationships and improving communication between VA and community organizations and agencies
- Promoting continuity of care to meet the needs of Veterans and caregivers
- Increasing referrals and support for caregivers and improving service plans for Veterans

The progress of the national VCP initiative affirms the continuing need for strong and healthy partnerships among VA and community providers, agencies, and service organizations to provide coordinated, quality health care and services for Veterans and their families.

An oft-cited challenge is that co-chairing a VCP is a collateral duty. VA staff have shared that taking on this role is outside of their regular duties and has significant impact because new co-chairs lack the community contacts, existing knowledge base, and the resources to begin. VCP Co-Chairs are tasked with pulling other VA staff who have this knowledge into a project without it being a mandate. However, time has shown that VCP Co-Chairs that are actively engaged with the VCP and the community find that their VCP efforts have led to expansion and growth of their respective pre-existing programs.

Indeed, **VCPs support VA's expanding efforts to amplify community engagement and partnerships to optimize choice and service for those who served.**

# VCP Trainings, Technical Assistance, Tools and Resources

## Trainings

Virtual mentoring and training were provided to VA and Community Co-Chairs seeking additional support or who were new to their positions. VCP mentoring training consists of 6 interactive 1-hour sessions focused on building and sustaining a VCP. The sessions are offered quarterly and cover the following topics:

Week 1: **VCP Overview, Mission and Vision and Goals**

Week 2: **VCP Resources**

Week 3: **Build a Strong Foundation**

Week 4: **Define a VCP Focus**

Week 5: **Develop Action Plans**

Week 6: **Promote, Sustain, Advocate, and Evaluate VCP**

The VCP Mentor Program started in 2019 and has offered the series of 6 sessions 11 times.

To date, 105 VCP Co-Chairs have participated in the mentor program. Of those that completed the program, 100% of the participants reported feeling more confident as a VCP Co-Chair because of their participation in the program.

Attendees **identified changes in professional practice/job function** based on what they learned, with the top 6 likely changes cited including:

1. Improved networking with VA staff and community partners
2. Increased collaboration
3. Using knowledge gained about VA and community resources
4. Conducting a needs assessment
5. Building relationships to make connections
6. Discovering the balance between marketing to Veterans and connecting Veterans to the VA and community partners

**VCP trainings provided relevant education and relationship building opportunities that benefit Veterans served by VA and in the community.**

## ***Technical Assistance, Tools, and Resources***

**Monthly Networking Calls** – Ongoing technical assistance is available to all VCP Co-Chairs through monthly networking and mentoring phone calls where they can share successes, challenges, and lessons learned, as well as seek coaching and advice. Guest speakers provide additional education about issues relevant to VCPs.

**VCP Toolkit** – The [VCP Toolkit](#), updated in FY2022 with significant input from VCP members across the nation, provides step-by-step guidance on forming a VCP and links to materials that can be customized, such as a VCP brochure and a VCP newsletter. To model the benefits of partnerships as well as meet pledges made to Congress, content from VHA’s Mental Health Summit Toolkit was integrated into the VCP Toolkit. In addition, the updated Toolkit contains links to VA services and resources, the VA App Store, videos, other VA Toolkits, statistics about Veterans, and more.

**Online VCP Resources** – A Site Roster, Fact Sheet, templates for Action Plans, Needs Assessments, Evaluations, PowerPoints, and more can be accessed via the [VCP Website](#).

## **Other FY2022 Accomplishments**

- Updated Talent Management System (TMS) courses for supervisors of VA VCP Co-Chairs and VISN VCP Points of Contact
- Refined standardized tools used to collect quarterly data about VCP progress and activities and updated the *Reporting System User Guide* to reflect changes
- Provided IDEA training to VCP Co-Chairs and members
- Streamlined VCP training, decreasing it from 6.5 hours to 5 hours

## **Future Plans**

- Expand VCP to every VHA Medical Center
- Create an informal partnership Due Diligence form
- Update the VCP SharePoint site
- Create an infomercial to promote VCP
- Evaluate new VCPs and get their feedback on VCP training, their progress, successes, and challenges

# Acknowledgements

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## **VHA Hospice and Palliative Care Program**

- Scott T. Shreve, Director

## **VHA Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care**

- Sherri DeLoof, Program Manager; Taryn Oestreich, Health Sciences Specialist; Marianne Shaughnessy, Director

## **VHA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**

- Michele Karel, Director

## **VHA Office of Rural Health, Veterans Rural Health Resource Center - Salt Lake City**

- Byron Bair, Clinical Director; Bret Hicken, Geriatric Domain Lead

## **VCP National Advisory Board**

- Sabrina Clark, VHA Center for Development and Civic Engagement
- Susan Edgerton, Disabled American Veterans\*
- Brendan Flinn, LeadingAge\*
- Lori Gerhard, Administration for Community Living\*
- Michele Karel, VHA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
- Sandy Markwood, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging\*
- Andrea Martinez, VA Office of Veterans Experience
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- Tracy Weistreich, VHA Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships
- Randy Felciano, National Council on Aging\*
- Danielle Latimore, VHA Office of Care Management and Social Work
- Leah Christensen, VHA Office of Caregiver Support
- Jason Malcom, VHA Hospice Veterans Partnerships

*\*ex officio member*



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