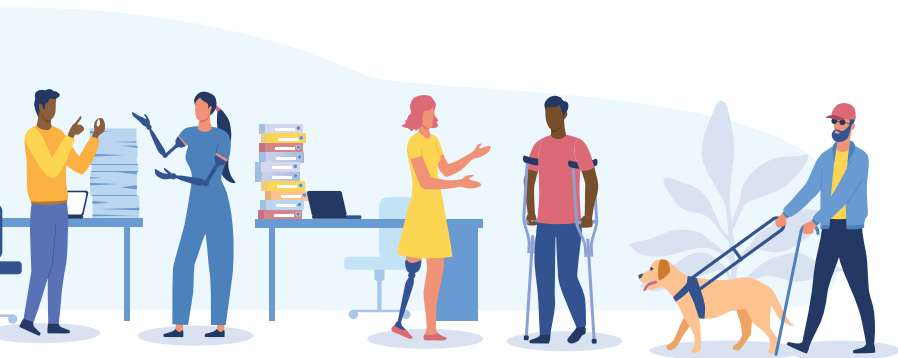




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VHA National Center for Health Care
Advancement and Partnerships

Support & Engagement



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VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

A Note from the Nurse Executive

In addition to the dazzling display of leaves changing from lush green to vibrant reds, oranges, and yellows, autumn reminds us of the importance of reflection, change, and preparation for new growth. With the end of the year approaching, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) National Center for Health Care Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) team is reflecting on our accomplishments over the last 12 months, modifying our strategies, and setting new goals for the next calendar year.

Our partnerships have continued to offer resources to help Veterans, their families, and caregivers thrive, and the outcomes of these collaborations fuel our work. We are celebrating the programs and initiatives that advanced the health and well-being of Veterans through the exploration of innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies as we continue to collaborate with partners to help Veterans live their lives to the fullest.

HAP is looking forward to announcing details about the partnership submission portal, which will make it easier for the public to share unsolicited partnership and innovation proposals with VHA. We hope to discover new partnerships that will support Veterans and connect them to the best care.

We are thrilled to continue working with Salesforce Military, a program within Salesforce, Inc., that was created for Veterans by Veterans, to help active military, Veterans and their families achieve the certifications and support needed for a career in technology.

Our partnership with the Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation, a non-profit organization that focuses on helping Veterans move seamlessly from military life into corporate organizations, allows us to assist Veterans and their spouses as they transition from military to civilian life.

The 2023 VHA National Community Partnership Challenge begins on January 9, 2023. HAP is excited to recognize those dedicated to helping Veterans who have sacrificed to protect our freedoms. In this issue, we will share more about the 2023 theme: Accelerating VHA's Journey to High Reliability Through Partnerships.

With the holidays around the corner, it's important to address how we are working with partners to support Veterans through the holiday season. Through our partnership with Pet Partners, we are able to expand animal-assisted interventions (AAI) to Veterans. We explain more about the benefits of the human-animal bond and how Veterans can experience AAI in person or virtually.

We are eager to continue working with partners like Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger to raise awareness about the risks that accompany food insecurity and ways to support Veterans. We are working to provide education and resources to make sure Veterans have access to sufficient and nutritious food choices.

Navigating the holidays can be difficult for some Veterans. To ensure they can reach out for help if they need it, we are thankful for our partners at [OnStar](#) and the safety and security system available in GM vehicles or through a mobile app.

Through our partnerships and initiatives, Veterans have found employment, financial success, community, and so much more. Our mission statement defines our organization's purpose and serves as a guide for our decision-making process. We are committed to serving as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community levels. We invite you to learn more about what we do and join us on this journey.



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



Partnership Submission Portal Announcement

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) National Center for health care Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) has developed an application that makes it easier for the public to share partnership ideas and health innovation proposals with Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Previously, the application was used solely for innovation proposals, but HAP also enhanced the portal to allow partnership ideas. With the improved online platform, the public can suggest new ideas to VA, which is necessary and important to health care advancement. VA hopes to discover new partnership ideas and services to support Veterans and their families.

“Everyone is welcome to share partnership proposals with us through the online portal,” said Christine Eickhoff, VHA Health System Specialist. “Partnerships are an effective force multiplier to increase the support and resources available to Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.”

Potential partnerships and innovations should align with [VA’s strategic plan](#) and VHA priorities, such as connecting Veterans to the soonest and best care, supporting their whole health, preventing Veteran suicide, and supporting Veterans’ caregivers and survivors.



The submission process is quick and easy. All proposals submitted to HAP go through a thorough review and due diligence process, and submitters will receive direct feedback from the HAP team. While the online application is open to anyone looking to submit a partnership proposal or health care innovation ideas, the application is not associated with any VA grant programs or funding opportunities.

For more information on the portal, please visit: <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/>

Helping Veterans Transition Smoothly from Active Duty to Civilian Life

While Service members often leave active duty with exemplary service records, the transition to civilian life can pose some challenges. In addition to practical concerns like where to live and which type of education or work to pursue, there are also emotional challenges and concerns for Service members and their families.



The Veteran Health Administration (VHA) National Center for Health Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) partnered with Salesforce, Inc. (Salesforce) to help active military as they transition into a civilian workforce.

Promoting Smooth Transitions to Civilian Employment

Salesforce Military, the VHA and Salesforce partnership helps Veterans learn new, high-demand technology skills, earn globally recognized certifications, access



additional career support benefits, and build on soft skills such as leadership, problem-solving, self-discipline, and teamwork. The Salesforce Military program is available at no cost to participants and is open to transitioning Service members, Veterans, Guard members, Reserve, and military spouses.

“Supporting both Veterans and their spouses is a critical element of this partnership and a shared priority for VHA and Salesforce,” said Christine Eickhoff, VHA Health System Specialist.

Members have access to additional benefits to support job readiness, like mentorship, fellowships, community support, and automatic job interviews with hundreds of employers.

“Salesforce is committed to providing 80,000 Service members, Veterans, and military spouses with access to the digital skills needed for in-demand careers in technology. The training is self-paced, virtual, and free to members,” said Katherine Clark, Head of Salesforce Military. “The collaboration between VHA and Salesforce has resulted in thousands of Veterans and military spouses joining the Salesforce Military program, learning about our technology, and beginning their journey of launching a career in tech.”

Supporting Veterans Beyond the Workplace

For Veterans who experience trauma while serving, adjusting smoothly to civilian life can be even more difficult. Post-traumatic stress or service-related injuries make it challenging for Veterans to work in physically demanding jobs and certain environments. Veterans and their families may also have difficulty handling challenges, like housing, food insecurity, and work-life balance, which makes it harder to transition to civilian life. Additionally, Veterans coping with post-traumatic stress need resources that help improve their overall well-being and readiness for civilian work, such as access to mental health and suicide prevention resources.

In addition to facilitating employment and career opportunities for Veterans and their families, the VHA and Salesforce Military partnership also connects Veterans to additional support and resources. The [Trailhead Military platform](#) includes information about VHA benefits and suicide prevention resources such as the [Veterans Crisis Line](#). Since the start of the partnership in 2020, Salesforce Military has served more than 55,000 Veterans and their families. Also, more than 16,000 individuals have completed the VA benefits and mental health resiliency modules.

To learn more about VA mental health resources for Veterans and their families, please visit:
<https://trailhead.salesforce.com/content/learn/modules/veteran-mental-health-and-resiliency-resources>

To learn more about VA benefits on Trailhead, visit:
[VA Benefits for Veterans | Salesforce Trailhead](#). Veterans can also reach out to the VA or their local Vet Center for more information.

The partnership with Salesforce Military is facilitated by the VHA National Center for Health Care Advancement and Partnerships (HAP). For more information on HAP's partnerships, visit <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships.asp>.



VHA Partners with the Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation to Support Veterans Seeking Employment

Many people may never understand all the challenges Veterans and their spouses face, especially as they transition from military to civilian life. In addition to health-related obstacles, some returning Service members also face economic and social challenges as they readjust to civilian life.

Since its founding, the Daniel and Salvador Heroes Foundation (Heroes Foundation) has been committed to assisting Veterans and their families with employment, economic stability, and health literacy opportunities. Not only do they focus on aiding Veteran-ready companies — companies who have created a support system within their workplace to hire and retain Veterans — the Heroes Foundation also develops strong Veteran-centric programs to assist Veterans.

VHA joined forces with the Heroes Foundation to help create more hiring opportunities for Veterans and transitioning Service members with job fairs, workshops, and seminars. The joint partnership augments Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) existing employment resources for Veterans and has led to additional VA resources that help Veterans transition smoothly from military life to corporate organizations. The partnership also raises awareness about the barriers and stereotypes that stand in the way of Veterans getting hired.

Acknowledging the Value of a Veteran's Skills

A number of the occupations Veterans hold during military service are parallel to their civilian counterparts in the business, energy, health care, and technology sectors; however, employers are often unaware of how military experience transfers to civilian occupations. The Heroes Foundation helps corporate leaders understand the relationship between military skills and civilian occupational job requirements and capabilities while providing opportunities to Veterans and former Service members.

Bridging the Gap Between Job Seekers and Veteran-Friendly Companies

The VHA/Heroes Foundation partnership also connects employers to the benefits and services VA offers to help employers recruit, hire, and retain Veterans. Through mentoring, team collaboration, digital transformation, and strategic partnerships, the partnership bridges the gap between job seekers and Veteran-friendly companies. Not only do they provide the training and support necessary for creating inclusive and welcoming corporate cultures that will help Veterans and their spouses thrive, but they also facilitate invaluable hiring events and trainings on how to be “Veteran-ready.”

The partnership with the Heroes Foundation is facilitated by the VHA National Center for Health Care Advancement and Partnerships (HAP). For more information on HAP's partnerships, visit <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships.asp>.





VHA National Community Partnership Challenge

Every year, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) highlights outstanding partnerships that benefit Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors through the VHA National Community Partnership Challenge (CPC).

The CPC is managed by the National Center for Health Care Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) for the Office of the Under Secretary. Not only does the CPC provide an opportunity to recognize and express appreciation for VHA employees and their community partners who are dedicated to helping Veterans, but it also publicly acknowledges the important work being done for Veterans and their families and helps spread best practices across the enterprise.

In 2021, the CPC theme was “Adaptability in a Changing World,” and in 2022, the CPC theme was “G.R.O.W” – partnerships that were goal-oriented, showed resiliency, addressed opportunities, and focused on wellness. HAP is excited to announce the 2023 theme: Accelerating VHA’s Journey to High Reliability Through Partnerships.

The CPC is open from January 9 to March 3, 2023, to VA medical centers, health care centers, community-based outpatient centers, clinics, program offices, and all VHA employees. Entries must demonstrate how the partnership serves Veterans of all races, ethnicities, sexual identities, languages, learning styles, and/or spiritual preferences. The partnerships must be nonmonetary between VHA and a nongovernment organization and have concurrence from executive leadership. All entries must showcase their organization’s proactive approaches to serving Veterans.

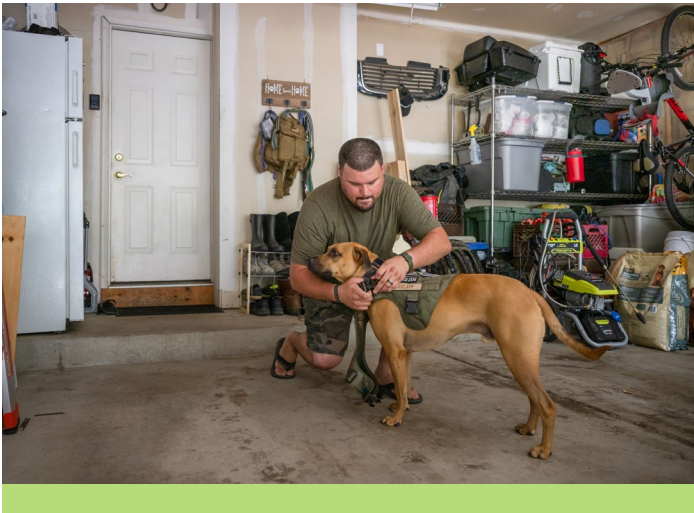
In addition to being honored and recognized with an award and ceremony from VHA and a commendation from VA secretary, HAP will also share the winners’ stories through multiple venues to highlight and spread their partnership ideas and outcomes. The VHA recognizes the importance of honoring the creative partnerships that augment invaluable services available through VA/VHA and extending them to those who are not enrolled or eligible to receive care through the VA.

For more information, contact: VHA_Partnerships@va.gov

Understanding How the Human-Animal Bond Helps Veterans

The human-animal bond (HAB) is a mutually beneficial relationship that promotes health and well-being for both the human and the animal. Animals can have a positive impact and provide support for people coping with physical or mental challenges, [helping to reduce anxiety and depression](#). Since 2019, the Veteran Health Administration’s (VHA) National Center for Health Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) has managed VHA’s partnership with Pet Partners to:

- Increase awareness about free animal-assisted interventions (AAI) available to Veterans
- Provide Veterans with more opportunities to interact with therapy animals
- Increase knowledge about AAI among VHA’s personnel as they serve Veterans



Pet Partners' trained volunteer handlers and therapy animals connect with Veterans at various locations, including the VA Medical Centers, across the country.

What is AAI?

Animal-assisted interventions are structured activities and interactions that incorporate animals in health, education, and human service to enhance an individual's physical or mental well-being. While Veterans can interact with therapy animals and experience the benefits of AAI in-person, online visits and events are also available where they can experience the HAB virtually.

What Kinds of Animals Are Trained for AAI?

Pet Partners therapy animal teams are made up of humans and animals that have successfully completed training that prepares them for interacting with people in schools, health care, and other settings. Therapy animal team visitations help to create a calm and relaxed environment for clients or patients by reducing anxiety and giving patients connection and comfort. Pet Partners works with nine species of animals that have completed behavioral screenings. VA works with Pet Partners to provide services to Veterans at VAMCs, including AAI with dogs, cats, rabbits, horses, and even miniature pigs. These animals have a special talent for interacting with people, and they enjoy these interactions.

How Can AAI Help Me?

In the same way that pets provide a HAB benefit to their owners, therapy animals can improve a Veteran's overall well-being and quality of life.

Coping with Mental Health Challenges

Interacting with a therapy animal has beneficial effects if you are coping with anxiety, depression, or loneliness. Not only do you receive unconditional love during interactions, but therapy animals **also increase feelings of social support**. Therapy animals intuitively do their part to form a HAB.

Managing a Crisis

Research shows that animals have a calming effect and greatly reduce stress symptoms. Animals help people manage high stress during a crisis. During stressful events, petting an animal encourages your body to release the "feel good" hormone, oxytocin, and helps your body decrease the stress hormone, cortisol. In fact, being around any pet in general helps your body to release oxytocin and decrease cortisol.

Interacting with Animals to Reduce Health Risks Related to Chronic Conditions

Scientific studies have shown that owning or fostering an animal can improve a Veteran's overall health and reduce health risks. Interacting with



animals, including therapy animals and pets, can help lower your blood pressure, which reduces the risk of heart disease and other associated conditions. Taking care of animals may also help you increase your physical activity and improve your sleep, which can help prevent chronic conditions.

Where Can I Find More Information about Therapy Animals or AAI?

To learn more about our partnership with Pet Partners, please visit:

<https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/petpartners/therapyanimalvisits.asp>

To learn more about AAI at VA, please visit:

<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/animal-assisted-therapies.asp>

To volunteer with Pet Partners, please visit:

<https://petpartners.org/volunteer>

The partnership with Pet Partners is facilitated by the VHA National Center for Health Care Advancement and Partnerships (HAP). For more information on HAP's partnerships, visit <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships>.

VHA Works with Partners to Address Food Security for Veterans

According to [Feeding Hunger](#), about 24% of active-duty Service members and their families are impacted by food insecurity in the United States. Veterans face a higher rate of food insecurity than the general U.S. population, and the rate is higher among those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan — almost twice that of non-Veterans. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and its partners have joined efforts to fight hunger and food insecurity among Veterans and their families.

While food security focuses on ending hunger, it also means having reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food. Food insecurity, on the other hand, is a lack of access to enough food for a healthy life.

The circumstances that give rise to food insecurity among military families are complex, and COVID-19 amplified the problem with rising prices, supply disruptions, and more. According to Megan Bowman, VHA Food Security Program Coordinator, “The pandemic, for better or worse, really shined the light on food insecurity in the United States in general, and that of course, translated over to VA. Suddenly, people were losing their jobs, inflation rose, and even access to food became an issue. We saw long lines to get into food pantries with people who hadn’t previously experienced food insecurity. Many people understood for the first time what food insecurity meant.”

To help Veterans experiencing food insecurity, VHA and partners have established about 47 food pantries in VA medical centers across the country along with food box programs. “VA alone isn’t able to provide food beyond that needed for inpatients. We rely on partners such as the Rockefeller Foundation and Feeding America,” Bowman explained.





Another VHA partner, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger (MAZON), advocates for food security among Veterans and other groups. VHA partners with MAZON to raise awareness about the risks that accompany food insecurity and to eliminate barriers to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which has proven to be an effective defense against ending hunger, advancing nutrition, and promoting health. Together, the partnership works with the national Ensuring Veterans Food Security Workgroup, which is co-led by Bowman, to facilitate communication and resources and to make sure Veterans have access to sufficient nutritious food choices.

The workgroup's first order of business was to set up a formalized screening of Veterans for food insecurity, which was implemented in the electronic medical record across the country. "Since 2016, we've screened over 10 million Veterans," said Bowman. "Now all Veterans who use VHA services are screened at least annually for food security."

The workgroup also helps educate VHA staff across health care disciplines, including primary care, social work, and nutrition. The partnerships between VA and organizations that are committed to combatting food insecurity are invaluable. VHA is working to ensure that all Veterans and their families have access to the nutrition they need to thrive.

To learn more about the Veterans Food Security Workgroup, please visit: <https://news.va.gov/76951/working-together-ensure-veteran-food-security/>

To learn more about SNAP, please visit: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>

The partnership with MAZON is facilitated by the VHA National Center for Health Care Advancement and Partnerships (HAP). For more information on HAP's partnerships or MAZON, visit <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships>.

VHA and OnStar Support Veterans Dealing with Holiday Blues

The winter holidays are often a joyous time for family and friends to come together. However, the holiday festivities — crowds, loud noises, the increased presence of alcohol, and more — often add stress for Veterans diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While this can make navigating the holidays difficult, support is available.



PTSD is a mental health condition that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening or traumatic event. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) [National Center for PTSD](#) estimates that about 8% of the population will experience PTSD at some point in their lives. Between 11% to 20% of Veterans who served in either Operations Iraqi Freedom or Enduring Freedom report having PTSD in a given year, and 30% of Vietnam Veterans have experienced PTSD in their lifetime.

All VA medical centers (VAMCs) have specialists available to provide treatment for Veterans diagnosed with PTSD, and there are nearly 200 specialized [PTSD treatment programs](#) throughout

the country. Program services include mental health assessments and testing, medications, one-to-one psychotherapy, group therapy, and family therapy. Not all VAMCs offer the same programs, and some specialty programs require a referral. Veterans should [talk to their VA health care providers](#) to determine which treatment program is right for them.

To ensure Veterans can reach out for help if they need it, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) also works with [OnStar](#), a safety and security system available in many GM vehicles or through a mobile app for those enrolled in the OnStar service.

OnStar recognizes the importance of working to keep Veterans safe when they return home, especially during the holidays.

“Our partnership with VA allows our Emergency Advisors to connect Veterans and their families to critical suicide prevention support services,” said Ann Maher, Emergency Service & Technology Integration Manager at OnStar. “This is an important partnership that allows us to serve the heroes who have served us.”

When a Veteran experiences a crisis and pushes the red emergency button in their vehicle or on the OnStar Guardian app, an OnStar Emergency-Certified Advisor can, if appropriate, connect them with the [Veterans Crisis Line](#). To help OnStar Advisors care for Veterans, VA also provides resources to help update available OnStar employee training programs.



Maher notes how important it is for Veterans to reach out to someone if they feel overwhelmed or in need of support. “Whether contacting the Veterans Crisis Line directly or by reaching out through OnStar’s Emergency Services, please take that first step and reach out.”

For immediate assistance, the Veterans Crisis Line is available 24/7, all year long. The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans, their families, and friends in crisis with qualified, caring VA responders through a confidential toll-free hotline. Just dial **988** and **Press 1**, [chat online](#), or send a text message to **838255**.

OnStar is a subscription-based service that allows users to contact OnStar call centers during an emergency. For more information on OnStar, visit www.onstar.com.

The partnership with OnStar is facilitated by VHA’s National Center for Health Care Advancement and Partnerships (HAP). For more information on HAP’s partnerships, visit <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships.asp>.

For more information about VHA partnerships, visit [va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships.asp](https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships.asp)

VA



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

To share a partnership opportunity or consult with HAP on a non-monetary partnership, please contact our office via email: VHA_Partnerships@va.gov or [va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships)



HAPPY Holidays

to Veterans, Service members,
and their families

WISHING YOU JOY AND WARMTH THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

HAP Promotes Partnerships

The mission of the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) is to serve as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community level and advance the health and wellbeing of Veterans through exploration of innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies. HAP's efforts are strengthened by the invaluable contributions and resources of public and private partnerships that work with VHA to support our nation's Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

Here are a few of the partnerships HAP supports:

American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP): The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and ACEP are working together to educate community emergency medicine clinicians about Veteran-specific conditions and care needs.

American Kidney Fund (AKF): VA and AKF are partnering to increase awareness of the risk factors, causes, complications, and treatments of kidney disease and its associated conditions.

Amyotrophic Later Sclerosis Association (ALS): VA and the ALS Association are working together to provide Veterans with greater access to ALS programs and services.

American Lung Association: VA 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.

Americans for the Arts (AFTA): The VHA and AFTA partnership focuses on increasing access to the arts and humanities and enhancing services for Veterans and their families.

Arthritis Foundation (AF): VHA and AF are working together to increase access to care, education, and support for Veterans diagnosed with arthritis.

Cigna: VHA is working with Cigna to create and share resources for safer prescribing of opioids to Veterans in pain.

Crohn's & Colitis Foundation (CCF): VHA and CCF are working together to raise the awareness of Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis and improve the quality of life for Veterans affected by chronic intestinal diseases.

Expiration Term of Service Sponsorship Program (ETS-SP): The VHA and ETS-SP partnership helps provide better support to Service members and Veterans across social determinants of health as they integrate into civilian life and communities.

GO₂ Foundation: VHA and GO₂ Foundation are working together to increase awareness of the importance of lung cancer screening for Veterans at high risk for the disease.

Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation (Heroes Foundation): VHA is working with the Heroes Foundation to provide Veterans with economic stability, employment, and health literacy opportunities.

Marcus Institute for Brain Health (MIBH): VHA partners with MIBH to meet the ongoing health care needs of Veterans diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury.

MAZON: A Jewish response to hunger: VHA is partnering with MAZON to increase awareness about the risks associated with food insecurity and options to address it through outreach to Veterans.

Medical-Legal Partnerships: VA is working with Medical-Legal Partnerships to provide VA medical facilities and volunteer attorneys to Veterans at no cost.

OnStar: VHA is working with OnStar to support Veterans who experience crisis and to increase suicide prevention services for them.

Parkinson's Foundation: VHA and the Parkinson's Foundation work together to increase Veterans' and health care providers' access to Parkinson's disease information and resources.

PATRIOTlink: VHA partners with PatriOTlink to improve the health and well-being of Veterans by providing them access to positive social determinants of health such as housing, employment, and food security.

Pet Partners: VHA partners with Pet Partners to bring Veteran patients the benefits of the human-animal bond.

Salesforce Military: VHA and Salesforce have developed a partnership to support Veterans and military service members who are transitioning out of active duty and into the civilian workforce.

Veterans Community Partnerships (VCPs): VCPs ensure that Veterans and their caregivers have access to care and support services.

Y-USA: VHA partners with Y-USA (the national entity that oversees YMCA facilities across the country) to provide effective services to Veterans.

*For more information on partnerships, please contact our office via email:
VHA_Partnerships@va.gov.*

For more information about HAP, please visit va.gov/healthpartnerships.