

OFFICE OF **NURSING SERVICES**



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ANNUAL REPORT

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration



A Message from Dr. Jennifer Strawn and Dr. M. Christopher Saslo

Welcome to the 2024 Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Nursing Services (ONS) Annual Report. Throughout this document, you will find numerous examples of the progress VA nursing personnel have made in 2024, resulting in more care for more Veterans than ever before. These examples detail the ingenuity, collaboration, resilience, and compassion VA nursing is known for, as well as the differences made in the lives of Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

VA nursing personnel continue to contribute to VA’s exceptional quality care delivery, as evidenced by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) report, wherein VA was found to perform better than non-VA (private sector) care providers. For the second year in a row, VA facilities were included in the CMS Overall Hospital Star Ratings and received higher star ratings on average than non-VA hospitals. Adding lasting impact to quality and clinical outcomes, two nurse-led programs continue to demonstrate exceptional value. Hospital Acquired Pneumonia Prevention by Engaging Nurses (HAPPEN), originated in VA by a nurse scientist, has been recognized as an Edge Runner program by the American Academy of Nursing. Edge Runner programs demonstrate significant clinical, financial, community, and policy outcomes. Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CCICM) continues to lead the evolution of a care practice framework that increases

patient access, satisfaction, and health outcomes. As of August 2024, CCICM has contributed to a cost avoidance of more than \$20 million (during the preceding 12 months) while being recognized for exceptional customer experience scores.

To better support health care facilities, ONS facilitated the publication of modernized nurse qualification standards and processes for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) and registered nurses (RNs), strengthening the nursing workforce. The revision established APRN-specific qualification standards, updated RN qualification standards, and implemented a natural progression up to and including Nurse II for RNs and Nurse III for APRNs who meet the basic eligibility requirements. Processes were improved based on feedback from VA nurses at all levels of the organization and have resulted in several substantial benefits, including improving objectivity and efficiency, thereby empowering nurses.

VA nursing also continued to make significant advancements through shared governance. Last year we reported that seven facilities had achieved their initial American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) - Pathway to Excellence® (PTE®) designation or redesignation. Since our last report, this list has increased to 13 facilities, in addition to two that had previously achieved ANCC Magnet® designation. To qualify, these organizations met stringent standards supporting work environments that recognize nurse contributions, support professional development, and nurture optimal work settings - all facets integral to the VHA Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan (VHA NWSP).

To VA nurses, we are deeply honored to be VA nurses with you as we pursue the transformational changes being led by you and supported by the VHA NWSP. With nurses in the lead, VA provides the safest, highest quality care possible. Please take a moment to review the short video, accessed through the QR code on this page, where we share several areas of focus for 2025, such that all VA nurses can participate in driving change across our organization.



**VIDEO SPOTLIGHT:
DR. SASLO AND DR.
STRAWN SHARE
ONS PLANS
FOR 2025**



Dr. Jennifer A. Strawn,
DNP, RN, NEA-BC

Executive Director and Deputy
Chief Nursing Officer

Dr. M. Christopher Saslo,
DNS, ARNP-BC, FAANP

Assistant Under Secretary for
Health for Patient Care Services/
Chief Nursing Officer

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About Office of Nursing Services (ONS)



ONS is organized into **two main operational groups**, Clinical Operations and Business Operations, each overseen by a dedicated leader.

CLINICAL OPERATIONS:

- Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CCICM)
- Clinical Practice (CP)
- Research, Evidence-Based Practice, and Analysis (REA)
- Workforce Leadership (WFL)

BUSINESS OPERATIONS:

- Strategic Planning and Communication (SPC)
- Policy, Legislation, and Professional Standards (PLPS)
- Nurse Staffing (NS)

The mission of the ONS is to empower the largest nursing workforce in the United States to deliver the highest standard of care to the nation's Veterans. By providing essential support and resources to field nurses, ONS ensures they have the tools, training, and guidance needed to excel in their roles. This support enables nurses to deliver exceptional care that meets the unique needs of Veterans, enhancing their overall health and well-being. Overall, ONS plays a critical role in ensuring that nursing services are available, effective, and responsive to the needs of Veterans, directly supporting VA's four statutory missions.

The dedication of VHA nurses, including APRNs, RNs, Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs), and Nursing Assistants (NAs), goes beyond routine care. They play critical roles across a wide range of settings, including acute care, residential care, ambulatory care, and interventional and telehealth services. VHA nurses are at the forefront of innovation, legislation, research, and evidence-based practice. Through their unwavering commitment, they transform the lives of Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors, fostering a culture of excellence in every aspect of care.

In 2024, VHA has provided more care and benefits to more Veterans than ever before, marking a significant milestone in serving those who have served the nation. This unprecedented level of care ensures that Veterans have greater access to the support they need, no matter where they are.

VA is the nation's **largest employer of nursing personnel**, with more than **121,000 NURSES**.



CCICM is dedicated to empowering nurses in the field by providing the necessary tools and support to manage the complex care needs of Veterans effectively. Veterans who have comprehensive and intricate care coordination needs are assigned a lead coordinator, who leverages the CCICM framework. This approach enhances care integration, improves outcomes, and reduces costs, ensuring that both nurses and Veterans receive the support they need across the continuum of care.



CP supports nurses in delivering high-quality care to Veterans through Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) recommendations and innovative practices. CP enhances patient outcomes and access to care through the Clinical Practice Program (CPP), the APRN Practice Program, Enterprise Standardization and Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM), and other nursing practice initiatives.



REA advances nursing through Research, Evidence-Based Practice (EBP), and Analytics. Nurse Scientists support nursing research in the field and in program offices to provide evidence to drive practice and policy changes. EBP works to maintain focus on evidence-based care of Veterans. The Analytics team focuses on clinical, administrative, and comparative data points to help inform operational decisions from policy to the point of care.



A strong nursing workforce is essential to improving health outcomes and health care delivery across all settings. **WFL's** Staffing Methodology, Registered Nurse Transition to Practice Residency Program, and Nursing Leadership and Excellence initiatives, along with broad collaborations across the nursing workforce and with professional partners, harness the full power of nursing to ensure healthy nursing pipelines, succession planning, and a safe, encouraging nursing environment.



PLPS plays a crucial role in assisting nurses in the field by removing legislative barriers that impact nursing practice and staffing. By developing, reviewing, and implementing national VA and VHA policies and legislative proposals, PLPS ensures that nurses have the support they need to provide optimal care. Additionally, PLPS oversees professional qualification standards for nursing, ensuring that nurses meet the highest standards in their practice.



NS eases the burden on field nurses by addressing supplemental staffing needs and enhancing recruitment and retention. The ONS Travel Corps offers a dedicated pool of RNs and APRNs for temporary assignments across VHA, supporting nursing services in rural areas and during emergencies. The National Nurse Consultant, Recruitment, and Resources Team streamlines staffing processes, ensuring efficient support while upholding the ONS commitment to high-quality, Veteran-centric care.



SPC plays an important role in empowering field nurses by leading the development and implementation of the VHA NWSP. This plan focuses on strategies to build and sustain a strong nursing workforce, ensuring nurses have the resources needed to fulfill the four statutory missions of VA. SPC also actively communicates timely, relevant, and helpful information highlighting excellence in VA nursing, inspiring innovation, and advancing nursing practice to transform health care for Veterans.

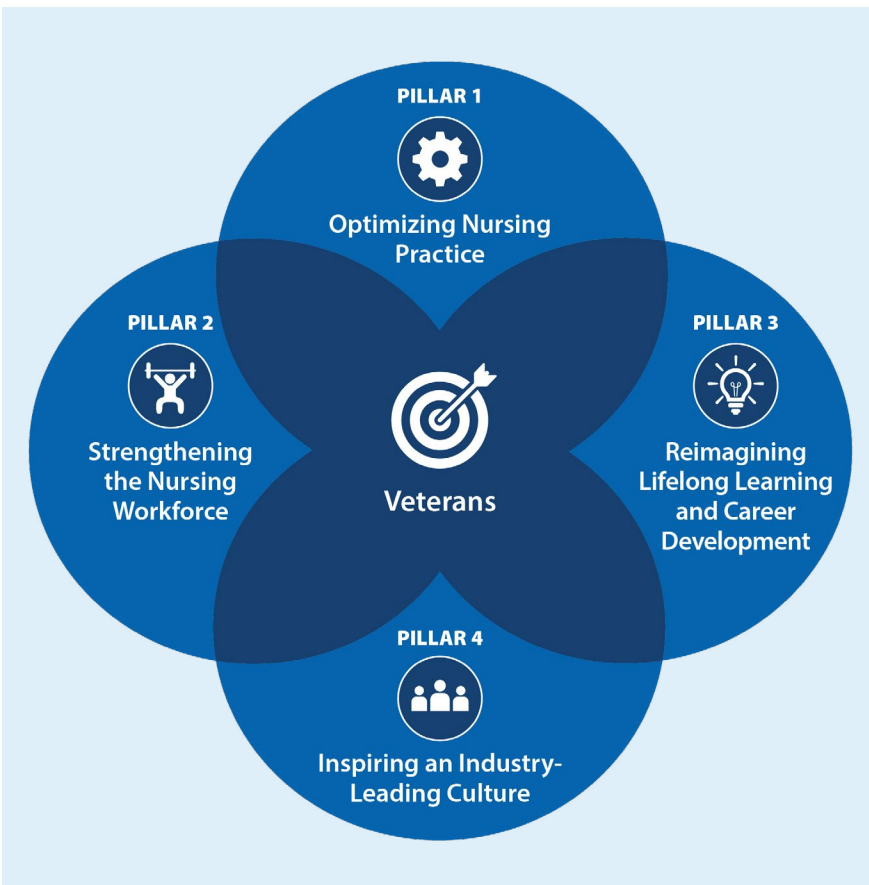
VETERANS INTEGRATED SERVICE NETWORK (VISN) CHIEF NURSING OFFICERS (CNOs): SUPPORTING NURSES IN THE FIELD

CNOs play a crucial role in supporting VA nurses, enhancing recruitment and retention efforts, and leading impactful programs that elevate care for Veterans. Through their leadership, **CNOs foster an environment where nurses can excel**, directly benefiting both the nursing workforce and Veteran health outcomes.



Agile Care: A Dynamic Workforce Strategy

The 10-year VHA NWSP provides the framework for cultivating a workforce optimally supported to achieve the four VA statutory missions. Annual tactical plans allow for the agility to flex the short-term priorities and strategies to meet new initiatives or emerging needs in national guidance. This adaptability strengthens care delivery and reinforces trust among Veterans, their families, and caregivers. The VHA NWSP cultivates a strong workforce armed with the tools to provide world-class care.



By integrating the latest advancements and VA Health Care Priorities, the plan is committed to cultivating a best-in-class nursing workforce. This adaptability strengthens care delivery and reinforces trust among Veterans, their families, and caregivers.

The VHA NWSP champions nursing excellence by aligning with VA's health care priorities, including the **High-Reliability Organization (HRO)**, **IDEA** (*Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access*), and **ICARE** (*Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence*) initiatives as well as VA's four missions. Through targeted initiatives, ONS strengthens recruitment, retention, and development of a highly skilled nursing workforce. By fostering a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and evidence-based practices, ONS ensures that nurses are equipped to deliver exceptional, Veteran-centric care. This strategic approach directly supports VA's missions—clinical care, research, education, and emergency preparedness—while enhancing access to quality care for all Veterans, ensuring they receive the best possible service across the VA health care system.

Strategic Pillar Objectives



Pillar One

Optimizing and Informing
Nursing Practice

- » VHA is a leader in developing **national standards of practice** for RNs, LPNs, and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) across all geographies and care settings.
- » Nurses hold **leadership positions** that define and **drive the strategy** in peer-to-peer collaboration with other leaders to influence and improve health care delivery.



Pillar Two

Strengthening the
Nursing Workforce

- » VHA cultivates a **diverse and inclusive workforce** that serves Veterans, families, survivors, and caregivers of all backgrounds and builds trust, cultural competencies, and catalyzed dynamic teams.
- » VHA's dynamic, streamlined, and **employee-centric** onboarding process offers accessible support and shortens times-to-unit for new hires.
- » VHA is the **employer of choice**, providing flexibility, mobility in career pathways, and best-in-class research and residency programs, **attracting high-caliber and diverse talent**.
- » VHA **benefits, compensation, and workplace environment** outpace the private sector.



Pillar Three

Reimagining Lifelong
Learning and Career
Development

- » Nurses in all settings have **protected time** for unparalleled breadth and depth of opportunities in education, research, teaching, and leadership experience.
- » Nurses have comprehensive, personalized **developmental journeys** customized to meet goals and guide their chosen career progression.
- » VHA fosters an environment of **intellectual challenge and pursues** EBP initiatives.



Pillar Four

Inspiring an Industry-
Leading Culture

- » VHA employs an industry-leading **shared governance model** across all care settings.
- » VHA nursing is the gold standard globally for **innovative health care delivery**, maximizing value to the community, Veterans, and the health care industry **by leveraging technology, creativity, and flexibility**.



ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE
NURSING WORKFORCE STRATEGIC
PLAN EFFORTS AND RESOURCES?

Join us monthly to earn one CEU.



LEARN MORE
ABOUT VA'S
HEALTH CARE
PRIORITIES.





2024 VHA NWSP Successes

LEADERSHIP LUNCH AND LEARN SESSIONS

These sessions are offered on the first and third Thursday at noon EST every month. NMs and assistant NMs (ANMs) can join for ANCC CEUs. More than 2,852 NMs and ANMs joined in 2024!

This annual report shares many success stories and efforts achieved around the VHA NWSP, including the collaborative work between the field and the ONS Project Management Office (PMO). In 2024, essential guidebooks crafted by national experts and front-line nurses were published. These resources were meticulously designed to address critical aspects of nursing leadership, workforce development, and care delivery within VA. By leveraging the expertise of those representing the field of nursing, these guidebooks offer practical, evidence-based strategies to enhance nursing leadership, streamline recruitment and retention efforts, and foster innovation in nursing practice. These tools are vital in ensuring the continued growth and strength of VA's nursing workforce, aligning with VA's commitment to providing exceptional care for Veterans.



VHA has met the strategic objective, and now **100% OF VISNS** have a VISN CNO!



Log in and check out all the guidebooks and other documents published in 2024.





Published in 2024:

- » Nursing Leadership Model Business Case
- » Nursing Leadership Succession Planning Guide
- » Transform Nursing Care Model
- » Mapping of Current Leadership Structures and Critical Roles

In development for 2025:

- » Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CCICM) Evaluation of Sustained Clinical Integration Toolkit
- » VISN CNO Guidebook
- » Associate Director, Patient Care Services (ADPCS)/Nurse Executive, Mentor/Mentee Guidebook
- » VA Central Office Nurse Toolkit



Published in 2024:

- » Optimizing Staffing Methodology to Support Organizational Stewardship Tip Sheet
- » Nursing Recruitment, Retention, and Relocation Toolkit
- » Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) Blueprint (72/80)
- » Feasibility Study of VHA School of Nursing
- » Student Nurse Technician (SNT)/Graduate Nurse Technician (GNT) Pipeline Guidebook
- » Expanding LPN/LVN and NA Pipeline Guidebook

In development for 2025:

- » NA Qualification Standard Implementation Guidebook
- » APRN Certification Resource Guidebook
- » Advanced Practice Orientation Guidebook
- » LPN/LVN Qualification Standard Implementation Guidebook



Published in 2024:

- » ONS Publication Toolkit
- » Let's Get Certified Campaign
- » Talent Experience Platform: Updating Your Nursing Education Fact Sheet
- » Academic Practice Partnership Guidebook

In development for 2025:

- » EBP in VA Handbook
- » Passport to Success Update

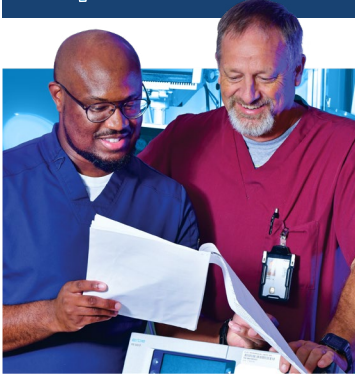


Published in 2024:

- » Pathway to Excellence® VA Supplement Guidebook
- » Magnet® Recognition VHA Supplemental Guidebook
- » Shared Governance Playbook
- » Employee Engagement and Recognition Guidebook
- » New Employee Orientation - Nursing Supplemental Guidebook

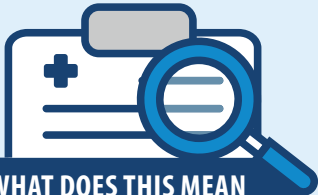
In development for 2025:

- » ONS Dashboard
- » Nurse Well-Being and Organizational Safety Guidebook



How are VA Nurses Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice?

ONS collaborates with the frontline nursing workforce to ensure the care of Veterans includes the most advanced technologies, clinical guidelines, and evidence-based best practices. By standardizing key processes, ONS is enabling the field to adopt consistent, high-quality approaches to care, enhancing health care delivery across the VA system. Discover how VA nurses have made impactful contributions in 2024, advancing these best practices and improving health care outcomes for Veterans.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR NURSES WORKING IN THE FIELD?

- Providing more **effective and efficient patient care** leads to better health outcomes for Veterans and increased nurse satisfaction.
- Enabling **access to advanced tools and technologies**, including telehealth services and other digital innovations, that streamline workflows, reduce manual tasks, and allow nursing personnel to focus more on patient care.
- Increase access **to up-to-date clinical guidelines and decision-support tools** helps nurses make informed decisions at the point of care, enhancing confidence and ability to provide high-quality care in diverse and challenging environments.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR VETERANS?

- **Improves health outcomes** with continued quality and safety initiatives.
- **Increases access to care** through efficiency in processes.
- **Promotes continuity of care** through service and beyond.

CCICM: Transforming Veteran Care and Achieving \$20 Million in Cost Avoidance

With the implementation of CCICM at all VA sites, preliminary data indicates that the deployment has significantly reduced direct and community emergency department visits, inpatient and residential lengths of stay, and avoidable admissions. These improvements underscore the positive impact of the lead coordinator and the leveraging of the CCICM framework on enhancing Veteran care and optimizing resource use.

Streamlining Veteran Care

The Referral Coordination Initiative (RCI) team—comprising nurses, providers, and administrative staff—works to streamline and standardize referrals, promote direct care within VA facilities, and encourage resource sharing across the enterprise. Critical efforts include VISN-led strategies for standardization, cross-facility scheduling, and standardized scripting. ONS partnered with the Offices of Integrated Veteran Care and Clinical Services to ensure nurses work at the top of their education, training, and certification as key members of the health care team. The initiative also promotes expansion of Nurse First triage, which leverages nurses' expertise to educate Veterans about VA care. These initiatives are crucial to improving care efficiency and ensuring Veterans receive timely and effective services.

2024 highlights include:

- Tools developed for VISNs and facilities to adapt to their unique markets and needs for planning, standardizing, and implementing RCI.
- Shared collaboration provided best practices, resources, and the development of cross-VISN partnerships and plans to improve the use of the RCI process.

IN 2024:

139 VA SITES implemented CCICM

100 VA SITES actively designated Lead Coordinators

The impact is a **\$20 MILLION COST AVOIDANCE**



Candace Whittler-Ducre, Clinical Nurse Specialist (left), and Beth Muriithi, RN, are part of the VA Indiana Health Care System, Indianapolis, IN, nursing staff who promoted key initiatives highlighting the importance of consistent oral care in preventing hospital-acquired pneumonia (HAP).

LOG IN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT RCI AND ACCESS TOOLS!



HIGHLIGHT ON ACCESS

The nursing workforce is developing and working to spread care models and tools that improve access and efficiency. For example, CCICM and RCI work **ensures that care is better integrated and coordinated**, allowing Veterans easier and more seamless access to services where, when, and how they need it. VHA nursing staffing methodology increases access for Veterans by strategically allocating nursing resources to meet demands across different care settings.

Significant Nursing Breakthroughs Don't Just HAPPEN

Breakthroughs in the health care field are the result of nurses. The HAPPEN program, developed by a VA nurse scientist, has significantly reduced non-ventilator hospital-acquired pneumonia (NV-HAP) rates and improved Veteran outcomes. Recognized as an Edge Runner by the American Academy of Nursing—an award for nurse-designed models of care that reduce cost, improve health care quality, advance health equity, and enhance consumer satisfaction—HAPPEN was also honored at the 2024 Health Policy Conference. Its success was entered into the Congressional Record, highlighting its profound impact on Veteran care, hospital costs, and quality of life for Veterans.

- NV-HAP is a common infection, affecting about **1 in 14 hospital admissions** globally.
- It leads to an estimated **6.3 million deaths** annually and costs the U.S. health care system more than \$3 billion each year.
- Veterans with NV-HAP are **3 times more likely to die within 30 days** compared to those without the infection.
- NV-HAP is expensive, with each case costing about **\$58,000** in the first month and **over \$100,000** within a year.
- The HAPPEN project **decreased VHA's NV-HAP rates by 40-60%** in participating VA sites, decreasing Veteran rates to **less than half** of the rates in other U.S. hospitals.
- The success of HAPPEN was accomplished by **one nurse and one patient at a time**. Thanks to all VHA front-line nurses for this remarkable achievement!

Protecting High-Risk Veterans

In collaboration with ONS, front-line nursing staff safeguard the most vulnerable Veterans by preventing and managing pressure injuries and ulcers. These efforts are crucial to ensuring that Veterans receive the highest standard of care, reflecting the dedication of VA nurses to their well-being. Key initiatives for pressure injuries and ulcers include the VA PUR App, the HRO National Zero Harm Measure, and the VA Approved Enterprise Standard (VAAES) Skin Inspection/Assessment Template. Each tool is vital in equipping nursing teams with the resources they need to provide exceptional care, reduce harm, and improve outcomes for Veterans.

ONS also partnered with VA's Office of Suicide Prevention (OSP) to develop various resources to assist field-based staff with measures and protocols to ensure the safety, well-being, and appropriate treatment of Veterans at risk of self harm and death by suicide.

In addition, ONS, in partnership with the VHA Office of Quality and Patient Safety, is working with the field for the standardization of falls prevention and management across VA. This initiative underscores the ONS commitment to creating a safer environment for Veterans and ensures they receive the comprehensive and compassionate care they deserve.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- When asked to evaluate the VA SKIN Bundle, a method developed to support VA's goal to eliminate avoidable pressure injuries, **100% of participating nurses** indicated it helped them understand the latest EBP in prevention.
 - » 86% believed the VA SKIN Bundle was easy to comprehend and use in clinical practice.
- The VA Tribal and Indian Affairs Advisory Health Care Subcommittee is gathering data to recommend wound care practices for tribal areas to the Secretary of VA.
- The Falls Prevention Field Advisory Committee (FAC), consisting of 20 members from various settings, was formed to assist nursing staff in reducing falls through the development of evidence-based practice tools and educational offerings.
- CP, in partnership with the Office of Quality Patient Safety, directed a VISN 8 pilot of the VA Mobility Screening and Solutions Tool for clinical outcomes, including fall prevention. **This pilot produced over 67,000 assessments of 8,452 unique patients** using a VAAES standardized template.
- In partnership with OSP, CP administered development and pilot testing of the first national standardized restraint and seclusion template note to record and track incidents of restraint and seclusion in VHA settings.
- CP collaborated with OSP for the development of a revised psychiatry-mental health nursing orientation guidebook.





Clockwise from top left: Salem, Virginia, VAMC nursing staff, Salem Virginia, VAMC transfer center staff, and Durham, North Carolina VAMC medical staff.

Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice: **Faces from the Field**



A Story of Exceptional Coordination

When staff at the Salem, Virginia, VA Medical Center (VAMC) discovered a Veteran had a severe heart condition requiring urgent cardiac care, they sprang into action. Salem VAMC staff worked closely with the Durham, North Carolina VAMC staff to coordinate a complex medical transfer across state lines. Through the extraordinary efforts of nurses, physicians, and other staff, the patient was safely transferred and scheduled for surgery within a day.

This case exemplifies VA’s and RCI’s commitment to ensuring Veterans receive the highest standard of care. While referring the Veteran to community care might have been the easier option, the Salem team chose to keep the care within VA. By leveraging RCI and facilitating a seamless transition, they ensured the Veteran received comprehensive, coordinated care.

“We strive to provide every Veteran with dedication and unwavering support,” said Kenneth Goldberg, Durham VAMC Chief of Staff.

Cutting-Edge Care: Surgery Advances

VA hospitals are renowned for their adherence to top-quality infection control standards that often exceed civilian benchmarks. Central to the success of these hospitals is their rank structure, which ensures effective leadership in operating room teams. Nurses with expertise in specialty surgeries and coordination are pivotal to these teams. Melissa Ringlein, surgery service nurse administrator at VA Ann Arbor Health Care System in Michigan, has been at the forefront of nearly 30 years of progress, witnessing advancements from basic procedures to innovative treatments like deep brain stimulation and minimally invasive robotic surgeries. Ringlein highlights the launch of advanced programs, such as the transcatheter aortic valve replacement, as one of many significant milestones in VA health care that she has witnessed throughout her career, contributing to the enhancement of care for Veterans.



Surgical medical staff perform a life-changing operation at the VA Ann Arbor Health Care System.

Nurse Educators at Orlando VA Win Innovation Team Award

The Federal Executive Association of Central Florida's annual Federal Employee of the Year Awards celebrate outstanding federal service in Central Florida. Among the honorees was the Nurse Educators Team at the Orlando VA, who received the Innovation Team Award. This prestigious recognition highlights their groundbreaking work in advancing nursing education and enhancing patient care for Veterans through creative strategies which include podcasts, microlearning, escape rooms, gamification, and simulation. The Nurse Educators Team's innovative strategies have set a new standard in health care, improving Veteran outcomes and serving as a model for health care institutions nationwide.



Orlando VA Medical Center Nurse Educators Team



VIDEO SPOTLIGHT: PAW-SITIVE INNOVATIONS FOR OLDER VETERANS

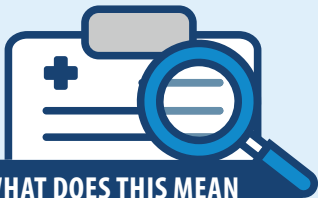
Explore the innovative nursing practices in the Acute Care for Elders (ACE) Unit at the Charleston, South Carolina VAMC, proudly recognized with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement Age-Friendly Designation. This honor acknowledges clinical care settings implementing reliable, evidence-based interventions for older adults, focusing on the 4 Ms: What Matters, Medications, Mentation, and Mobility. Discover how the team introduced stuffed "pets" for Veterans that provided comfort during hospitalization and beyond.





How are VA Nurses Strengthening the Nursing Workforce?

VA nursing leadership has worked to significantly strengthen the workforce through initiatives that enhance preparedness through structured support, mentorship, and hands-on training. These efforts, including flexible scheduling, wellness programs, and legislative advocacy, ensure VA nurses are well-equipped and motivated to deliver exceptional care to Veterans.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR NURSES WORKING IN THE FIELD?

- Recruiting and retaining a robust and talented nursing workforce ensures nurses are not overburdened. Appropriate staffing levels and mix of nursing personnel **reduces burnout and fatigue**, allowing nurses to provide higher quality care and maintain better work-life balance.
- Advocating for appropriate use of AWS to attract and retain top talent, facilitating an environment that **decreases burnout and fatigue**.
- Supporting the frontline through resilience and well-being initiatives, including Employee Whole Health and Reduce Employee Burnout and Optimize Organizational Thriving (REBOOT), focusing on nurses' mental and physical health, **helping them to stay resilient and thrive** in the face of the demands of their profession.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR VETERANS?

- **Improves quality of care** through skilled recruitment and retention.
- **Enhances access** to care.
- Ensures Veterans continue to **receive the high-quality, timely, and personalized care** that is the hallmark of VA.

Strengthening the Nursing Workforce, Increasing Access for Veterans

The Registered Nurse Transition to Practice (RNTTP) Residency Program supports newly licensed RNs in shifting from academic learning to competent clinical practice. The 12-month program equips nurses with the skills and knowledge needed to serve Veterans. Alongside this, the 72/80 AWS offers RNs the flexibility to work 72 hours over two weeks instead of the traditional 80. This innovative scheduling approach enhances recruitment and retention, improves job satisfaction, and promotes better work-life balance. By reducing nurse burnout and extending their availability, both initiatives increase access to high-quality care for Veterans, ensuring more consistent and effective service delivery, and strengthen the nursing workforce.

107 VA MEDICAL FACILITIES have active RNTTP programs.

Since 2019, **4,288 NEWLY GRADUATED RNS** have participated in the RNTTP program.

17 VISNS have RNs participating in the 72/80 AWS.

70 MEDICAL FACILITIES are using the 72/80 schedule, up 34.6% from last year.

There has been a **159% INCREASE** in RNs using 72/80 AWS, from 3,000 to 7,758.

Whole Health at VA in Action

Whole Health is a holistic approach to health care that supports and equips VA employees and Veterans to take charge of their health and well-being and live their life to the fullest. Instead of focusing solely on treating illness or injury, Whole Health emphasizes a proactive approach to well-being, encouraging reflection on goals, values, and what matters most in life. Nurses' well-being directly impacts patient care. When nurses take time for their own whole health and well-being, they model healthy behaviors for their colleagues and Veterans.



Nurses! Take your well-being to the next level with **#LiveWholeHealth** and find online videos and tips for your own self-care.



For more information on employee Whole Health



HIGHLIGHT ON ACCESS

By recruiting and deploying a skilled nursing workforce, including travel nurses, ONS ensures that **care is available in high-demand and underserved areas** and offers improved access to health care services, particularly in rural and remote locations.

Heroes on the Move: ONS Travel Nurses Deliver Critical Support

Travel Corps RNs play a vital role in overcoming staffing gaps and ensuring Veterans receive access to timely, high-quality care. Their flexibility and expertise are essential to supporting key initiatives, including the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins Act, which expanded screening for millions of Veterans; the EHRM system that enhances health record management; and the Transitional Community Care Inpatient Case Manager that supports the continuum of care. This adaptability strengthens overall capacity and directly contributes to effectively implementing crucial programs that meet Veterans' needs efficiently and with comprehensive support.

66 TRAVEL CORPS NURSES supporting the field daily.

125,997.03 HOURS of supplemental staffing support provided.

Travel Corps RNs working virtually **SAVED AN ESTIMATED \$162,962** by reducing travel costs and improving efficiency.



Log in to the VHA Nursing Qualification Standards site for a comprehensive understanding of VHA's modernized qualification standards and processes. The site is filled with training, tools, and resources such as:

- Recorded training
- Tools for self-assessment, promotion consideration/reconsideration, awards, and appointment
- Frequently asked questions
- Points of contact
- Supervisory toolkits
- Functional statement samples



POLICY AT WORK FOR NURSES

ONS is working with VHA Workforce Management and Consulting to modernize the qualification standards for nurses. The offices made strides toward this goal in 2024, specifically for APRNs and RNs, and also began the modernization process for LPNs/LVNs and NAs. These changes aim to empower nurses, streamline processes, and improve efficiency and access.

- Modernized the Nurse Qualification Standards for the roles of CRNA, Nurse Practitioner (NP), Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM), and RN to align with current advances and professional practice.
- Empowered nurses by improving objectivity and efficiency
- Streamlined the dimensions to focus on five critical aspects of professional nursing practice
- Implemented natural progression up to and including Nurse II for RNs and Nurse III for APRNs whose performance is satisfactory or higher and who meet the basic education and experience requirements
- Established qualification standards specific to the APRN roles of NP, CNS, and CNM for the first time in VHA.
- Standardized the rating period to align with the fiscal year cycle and to be consistent with Title 5, Hybrid Title 38, and other Title 38 occupations
- Improved processes based on feedback from VHA nurses at all levels
- Leveraged foundational sources such as the American Nurses Association, American Association of Nurse Practitioners, American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology, American College of Healthcare Executives, and American Organization for Nursing Leadership
- Implemented best practices identified in the nursing community
- Eliminated the professional standards board, returning time back to patient care



Tiffany Strain, RN



Kelsey Keffeler, RN

Strengthening the VA Nursing Workforce: Faces from the Field



*I learned in a controlled environment and built on my skill base slowly, which also increased my confidence. Because of the program, I now have **certifications and skills** that many of my classmates in other facilities are still learning or have not had the chance to pursue.*

- Tiffany Strain, RN



Success Stories from VA's RNTTP Residency Program

The VHA RNTTP programs are pivotal in fostering the confidence and competence necessary for nurses to excel in caring for Veterans. At the VA Black Hills Health Care System in South Dakota, the centralized RNTTP program enhances professional development through structured monthly reflective journaling and a comprehensive final reflection. These components highlight the program's role in preparing nurses to meet the unique needs of Veterans.

RN Tiffany Strain reflects, "I learned in a controlled environment and built on my skill base slowly, which also increased my confidence. Because of the program, I now have certifications and skills that many of my classmates in other facilities are still learning or have not had the chance to pursue."

RN Kelsey Keffeler notes, "Rotating through multiple units allowed me to make professional connections and gain contacts and resources. I was also able to learn skills I wouldn't have learned if I was orientated on one unit. Overall, I think the RNTTP program is fantastic for new nurses, and I would highly recommend it to all new nurses."

Rapid Response Ready: Strengthening Emergency Department (ED) Care

The VA Hampton, Virginia Health Care System has launched a groundbreaking ED Nurse Internship Program designed to enhance the recruitment and retention of new and experienced nurses in the ED. As the first VAMC to adopt the Emergency Nurses Association Residency Program, this 18-week initiative offers an evidence-based curriculum featuring online training, simulations, and case studies, continuously updated with best practices. This program fosters professional growth and strengthens VA's competitive edge against community hospitals. It boosts nurses' confidence, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, preparing them for independent practice. The inaugural cohort included Lara Pablo, a seasoned ED nurse aide promoted to RN, and Tina Maresh, a recent RN graduate. Lara notes, "It is a great opportunity for new nurses to work in a fast-paced environment with guidance from competent preceptors."

A DAISY of Distinction

Hundreds of VA nurses receive the DAISY Award each year for their exceptional dedication to Veterans. The DAISY Award, which stands for Diseases Attacking the Immune System, was established by the Barnes family in honor of their late son, Patrick, to honor the nurses who cared for him with incredible kindness and compassion. This recognition of efforts helps VA strengthen the nursing workforce by boosting morale and job satisfaction, among other benefits. While ONS wishes we could highlight each deserving individual, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all of them for their outstanding contributions.

One such awardee is Felicia Lloyd, a dedicated RN with the Intensive Community Mental Health Recovery (ICMHR) Services team at the W. G. (Bill) Hefner VAMC in Salisbury, North Carolina. With 13 years at VA and five years with the ICMHR team, Felicia exemplifies commitment and care. She prioritizes Veterans' psychosocial needs and goes the extra mile, often sacrificing personal time to resolve issues. Felicia's flexibility allows her to address evolving needs, from immediate placements to substance abuse support. A notable success story involves her support for a Veteran struggling with symptoms associated with diagnoses of bipolar disorder and substance abuse. She arranged child care, accompanied the Veteran to the ED, and facilitated ongoing treatment. Thanks to Felicia's steadfast support, the Veteran has achieved significant personal milestones, including breaking records in long-distance races.



Tina Maresh (left) and Lara Pablo demonstrate their Emergency Nurses Association Residency Program skills in the VA Hampton ED.



Amy L. Daly, MSN, RN, VA-CM



Felicia Lloyd, RN

VIDEO SPOTLIGHT: UNLOCKING TALENT: ONS TOOLS FOR NURSING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

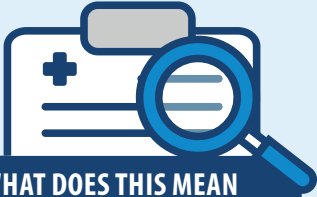
In this insightful video, VA Nurse Recruiter Amy L. Daly discusses the 3R (Recruitment, Retention, and Relocation) Toolkit, and other vital tools that enhance recruitment and retention, while VA nurse recruiter Trish Puleo addresses the value of the 72/80 work week. Discover how these innovative resources streamline the hiring process,



support ongoing professional development, and ensure that VA continues to attract and retain top nursing talent.



PILLAR 3



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR NURSES WORKING IN THE FIELD?

- Lifelong learning ensures nurses **stay current with the latest** medical advancements, technologies, and best practices.
- Continuous education allows nurses to **develop specialized skills** in geriatrics, mental health, and chronic disease management relevant to the Veteran population.
- **Opportunities for career development and advancement** keep nurses engaged and thriving. Nurses who feel they have opportunities for growth and advancement are more likely to be satisfied with jobs, leading to higher retention rates and improved patient care outcomes.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR VETERANS?

- Veterans **have better health outcomes** as they receive care based on the most current research and clinical guidelines.
- Veterans **receive high-quality care** from empowered and satisfied nurses who have clear pathways for career advancement and professional growth.
- Ongoing education in patient-centered care **ensures that nurses are adept at providing care** that respects and responds to Veteran preferences, needs, and values.



How are VA Nurses Reimagining Lifelong Learning and Career Development?

VA nurses are redefining lifelong learning and career development by embracing accessible educational opportunities and leadership roles. ONS strives to encourage nurses with tailored pathways for growth, fostering an environment of intellectual challenge, and expanding their expertise to enhance patient care and professional fulfillment.

Exemplifying Quality Care: Five-Star Community Living Center (CLC) Achievements

The G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery VAMC CLC in Jackson, Mississippi, achieved a five-star rating from VA's CLC Compare, placing it among the top nursing homes in VA and private sectors. This prestigious rating reflects the CLC team's dedication to providing exceptional care to Veterans. Through a focus on accountability, refined practices, and streamlined processes, the CLC has become a model of long-term care, ensuring its residents' safety, well-being, and satisfaction. The G.V. Montgomery VAMC joins 116 other VA CLCs who have achieved a five-star rating, a testament to the quality of care offered at these facilities.

Brian Pauley, associate director for patient care services, noted, "This five-star rating highlights our team's relentless effort over the last two years, marking a key milestone in our journey toward excellence. It signifies our commitment to delivering superior care to our Veterans."

State of the Art Nursing

In partnership with ONS, nurses from the VHA Office of Research and Development hosted a State of the Art Conference (SOTA) to establish a Nursing Research Agenda and plan for sustained funding in nursing research. The SOTA focused on three critical areas: optimizing nursing practice, strengthening the nursing workforce, and inspiring an industry-leading culture.

Following the conference, the nurses were awarded a grant to support two key proposals for VA research support: a Nursing Data Research Consortium to enhance nursing science data infrastructure and foster a community of nurse scientists; and a Learning Health System Quality Enhancement Research Initiative aimed at bolstering nurse leader recruitment, development, and retention. These initiatives demonstrate the pivotal role of nurse scientists in advancing implementation science at VA, with results already improving care for Veterans.

HIGHLIGHT ON ACCESS

ONS ensures nurses **have the skills to provide high-quality care through training and professional development programs**. This focus helps to maintain a competent and effective workforce that can meet the evolving needs of Veterans.



Elevating Veteran Care Through EBP

ONS defines EBP as the integration of the best available evidence, clinical expertise, and patient preferences at the point of care. The EBP methodology improves patient care outcomes, decreases costs, strengthens nurses, improves nurse satisfaction, and leads to higher retention of nurses.

In 2024, REA launched a VHA-specific EBP educational program for VISNs 4 and 16, consisting of eight sessions over four months. The course, which addressed a critical need, was completed by 117 participants and led by the EBP FAC members. The course offered continuing professional education credits and 27 EBP initiatives are now underway, addressing clinical issues such as falls, pressure injuries, transitions of care, and infections.

Additionally, ONS and the Defense Health Agency are leveraging a \$1.7 million Joint Incentive Fund grant to educate nurses in EBP and promote the sharing of best practices across both health care systems.

Enhancing Quality and Access: The Role of CP Support for Field Nurses

To improve the quality of care and expand access for Veterans, CP, in collaboration with other VHA program offices, empowers front-line nurses with the tools, resources, and guidance they need to deliver exceptional care through the development and evaluation of EBP standards and dissemination of best nursing practices.

2024 highlights include:

- Creation of a Clinical Nurse Advisor position and FAC for Falls Prevention
- Development of the Alcohol Withdrawal Management Toolkit



Check out **VA Library Network resources** that support nursing staff! Get step-by-step instructions on clinical skills and much more.





Thomas Ballan-Duran, DNP, RN

Reimagining Lifelong Learning and Career Development: **Faces from the Field**



From Combat Medic to NM

Texan Thomas Ballan-Duran's journey from Army combat medic in Afghanistan to Nurse Manager (NM) of outpatient mental health at the Carl T. Hayden VAMC in Phoenix, Arizona, is a story of overcoming challenges and personal growth. After 9 years of military service, including a year in Afghanistan, Thomas transitioned to civilian life and began his nursing career at the Phoenix VA.

While adjusting to life after service, Thomas remained committed to his personal and professional development. He received a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree at Grand Canyon University in May 2024. Recently promoted to an NM position, Thomas continues to give back to his community, serving on various committees and mentoring his colleagues. His journey is a testament to resilience, compassion, and a deep commitment to making a difference in the lives of Veterans.

Excellence in Lifelong Career Development

RN Courtney Monterusso of the VA St. Louis Health Care System in Missouri has been awarded the prestigious Excellence in Administrative Ambulatory Care Nursing Practice Award by the American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (AAACN). This honor reflects Courtney's unwavering dedication to lifelong career development and her exceptional contributions to ambulatory care nursing. Through continuous learning and professional growth, Courtney has become a leader in her field, setting a high standard for others to follow.

"Receiving this award is the culmination of over 20 years of work in a non-direct patient care role. It's a validation that direct care staff need support to help them navigate the ever-changing operational and clinical tempo. As a Veteran and a nurse, I encourage every nurse to embrace opportunities for growth because each step forward benefits both you and the Veterans you serve," Courtney said.



Courtney Monterusso, RN

A Career of Service and Leadership

Sean Harris, chief APRN, has dedicated his career to serving Veterans, embodying the values of leadership, compassion, and community involvement. Sean became an NP while serving in the U.S. Army, eventually retiring as chief of family practice in 2016. In his role at the Kansas City, Missouri VAMC, Sean has been instrumental in increasing productivity among APRNs by more than 10% and significantly reducing wait times for specialty care services, ensuring Veterans receive timely access to the care they deserve.

Beyond his professional achievements, Sean remains committed to his community. He serves as the board chair for a Missouri emergency and homeless shelter, which supports an annual population of nearly 20% Veterans. Sean's dedication to his profession and community exemplifies the spirit of service he also brings to his work with Veterans.



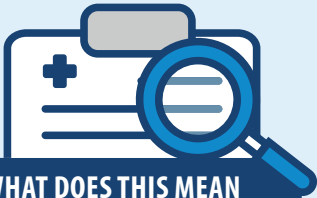
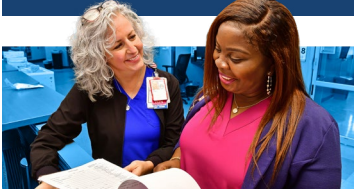
Sean L. Harris, DNP, FNP-C



VIDEO SPOTLIGHT: VIRTUAL POSTER CONFERENCE: CELEBRATING NURSING LEARNING AND INNOVATION

Explore how VA nursing teams are driving innovation in care. At Durham VA Health Care System in North Carolina, nurses optimized infusion times to improve efficiency and patient outcomes, while Palo Alto Health Care staff in California enhanced critical thinking with simulation-based training. These EBP projects reflect the collaboration and dedication of VA nurses in advancing care for Veterans.





WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR NURSES WORKING IN THE FIELD?

- An inclusive culture ensures that VA nurses *feel respected and valued* regardless of their background, ethnicity, gender, or orientation. This fosters a sense of belonging and enhances teamwork among diverse health care teams.
- VA demonstrates its commitment to valuing and investing in its nursing workforce by *exceeding private sector standards*. This elevates the profession within the health care industry and reinforces VA's role as a leader in health care excellence.
- A shared governance model *supports nurses* to participate in decision-making processes that affect their practice. This includes involvement in policy development, quality improvement initiatives, and professional development opportunities.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR VETERANS?

- An industry-leading culture promotes a *holistic approach to health* that considers Veterans' physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being and ensures nurses can meet all aspects of Veteran health.
- Continuous improvement is achieved by *regularly assessing and enhancing care practices* to benefit Veterans.
- The stability of a positive and supportive workplace culture increases job satisfaction among nurses, which leads to lower turnover rates and *ensures that Veterans receive care from experienced and dedicated nursing staff*.



How Are VA Nurses Inspiring an Industry-Leading Culture?

Nurses are at the heart of VA's mission to serve Veterans, delivering tireless and compassionate care that profoundly impacts the lives of those who served. Nurse leaders throughout the enterprise strive to foster an inclusive and equitable culture that inspires every nurse. With the goal to surpass private-sector standards by offering competitive benefits and compensation while implementing a shared-governance model, VA wants to ensure that all nurses have a voice in shaping their practice.

Inspiring an Industry-Leading Culture Through Shared Governance

VA's nursing shared governance model empowers nurses by giving them a voice in decision-making, which fosters collaboration, innovation, and excellence. This approach enhances job satisfaction and drives continuous improvements in patient care. By directly involving nurses in shaping their practice, VA ensures the highest standards of care, setting an industry benchmark and cultivating a culture in which every nurse feels valued and motivated to serve Veterans.

Many VAMCs are making strides in shared governance every day. One example is the Erie VAMC in Pennsylvania. By modernizing and streamlining its shared governance structure, nurses are laying the foundation for

excellence through the PTE® program. Key initiatives include annual council evaluations, leadership training, and integration into the VHA NWSP. The facility promotes a positive practice environment with observations such as Nursing Excellence Day, increased recognition opportunities for certified nurses and volunteers, engagement activities aligned with PTE® standards, and other activities that contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and outstanding care for Veterans.

Turn the page to discover how the relationship-based care (RBC) work at the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, took the facility from zero shared governance groups to more than 20 in one year!

**HIGHLIGHT
ON ACCESS**

By promoting shared governance, leadership development, and a culture of continuous improvement, the VHA NWSP ensures that nurses are **well-equipped to provide high-quality, patient-centered care**. This leads to more safe, efficient, and effective health care delivery, reducing wait times and improving access to care for Veterans across VA.



Dr. Strawn meets with members of the ONS administrative support team, whose dedicated work supports ONS initiatives.

Supporting Nurses to Achieve Their Best

The ANCC Magnet® and PTE® are more than symbols of health care excellence – they reflect a commitment to fostering nursing talent and enabling nurses to achieve their full potential. These honors are not just about recognition; they directly impact patient outcomes, nursing staff stability, and the implementation of shared governance. Pathway-designated organizations are recognized as top workplaces for nurses, boasting high levels of nurse satisfaction and retention. In 2024, the Clement J. Zablocki Veterans’ Administration Center was established as a PTE® facility, making for a total of 13 PTE® and 2 Magnet recognized VHA centers. Congratulations to all!

Elevating Nursing Voices

The APRN Practice Program advocates for APRNs across the enterprise and provides practice consultation to VHA program

offices, VISNs, and leadership at VA health care systems and medical centers. The focus is on strengthening and enhancing excellence in advanced practice nursing through leadership, collaboration, and communication.

Collaborative Expertise for Enhanced Patient Care

The Clinical Practice Program plays a vital role in supporting front-line nursing staff by leveraging the expertise of 14 Clinical Nurse Advisors, each leading respective specialty FACs, which total over 140 front-line staff. These Clinical Nurse Advisors serve as subject matter experts in their specialties, guiding the development of essential evidence-based resources, including guidelines, educational tools, and documentation aids. This collaborative effort ensures that field nurses have the latest resources and support available in specialty nursing practice to improve patient care and outcomes.



Nurses: Share your thoughts on enterprise standardization! Your feedback is greatly valued.



View all FACs, meet the members, and see the latest programs and projects in progress.





The Aleda E. Lutz Medical Center's Nurse Honor Guard with Irene M. Hosking (center).

Inspiring an Industry-Leading Culture: Faces from the Field

Honoring Irene M. Hosking: A Legacy of Service and Inspiration

World War II Veteran and Army nurse Irene M. Hosking passed away at 106 years old in August 2024, but her legacy continues to inspire an industry-leading culture within VA and beyond. Born in 1918, Irene's trailblazing service during World War II exemplifies the dedication and resilience that define the nursing profession. In June 2024, Irene was recognized by the Aleda E. Lutz Medical Center's Nurse Honor Guard as an honorary member, and her celebration took place aboard the USS Edson at the Saginaw Valley Naval Ship Museum in Bay City, Michigan. Her legacy reminds us of the major contributions that nurses have made throughout history, many of which shaped the standards of care and compassion that guide us today.

Tiny Homes Offer New Beginnings for Homeless Veterans

Hansel Moore—an RN and facility telehealth coordinator for the VA Tennessee Valley Health Care System—is helping house Veterans via the Veterans in Transition American Legion (VITAL) initiative through American Legion Post 207 in Spencer, Tennessee. The 400-square-foot tiny homes, funded entirely by donations, are one way VITAL and volunteers like Hansel are granting Veterans more stability. They are also giving Veterans access to essential services like health care, job placement, and financial planning.

This project goes beyond providing shelter—it's a powerful example of how community and compassion can inspire an industry-leading culture.



The work of Hansel and the volunteers serves as a beacon of hope—not only for the Veterans they support but also as a model for communities across the nation, proving that real change is possible through creativity and compassion.


Martinsburg VA Health Care System Achieves 4th Pathway to Excellence Designation

The Martinsburg VA Health Care System in West Virginia has proudly earned its fourth PTE® designation from the ANCC. This prestigious recognition reflects the unwavering commitment of Martinsburg nurses and the entire team to delivering exceptional care to Veterans. The designation honors facilities that exemplify the six PTE® standards: shared decision making, leadership, safety, quality, well-being, and professional development. “Our nursing staff persevere and excel despite challenges. I am beyond proud of this team and the care they provide to Veterans,” said Sandra Sullivan, VISN 5, Deputy Chief Nursing Officer.



Hansel Moore, BSN, RN

Meet Hansel Moore, an RN at the VA Tennessee Valley Health Care System, who is transforming lives through the VITAL initiative and American Legion Post 207 by providing Veterans with housing and hope.





The dedicated team at VA Martinsburg Health Care System proudly celebrates earning their fourth PTE® designation.



VIDEO SPOTLIGHT: STRENGTHENING SHARED GOVERNANCE

When Acting ADPCS Lynn Ives appointed Clinical Nurse Leader David Kinsey to lead RBC training at the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she had no idea how quickly relationship-based care (RBC) would positively impact governance efforts. The facility grew from zero to more than 20 shared governance groups in just one year, with 800 medical professionals completing RBC classes!





VHA Nursing by the Numbers 2024

VA is the **largest employer** of nursing personnel in the nation, with more than **121,000 nurses**, including:

10,749
APRNs*

81,799
RNs

15,169
LPNs/LVNs

14,019
NAs

*APRN includes **CNP, CRNA, CNS**

Nursing personnel make up an impressive **29.2%** of the **entire VHA workforce**.



6,532,268
unique patients were treated.

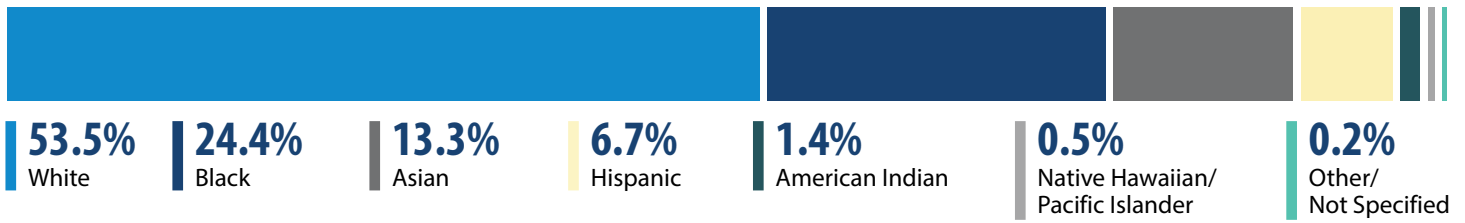


33,684,093
outpatient encounters with documented nursing involvement.




1,720,080
video telehealth patient visits were facilitated by nurses.

VHA NURSING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY DEMOGRAPHICS




12.6% of the VHA nursing workforce are **Veterans**.

6.4% of the nursing workforce comprise employees **working with a disability**.



63.2%
of nursing personnel have a **higher education**.



17.5%
increase in **doctoral degrees** among APRNs.

VAAES HEALTH FACTOR DOCUMENTS

VAAES health factor documents ensure consistent, first-class health care for Veterans while setting standards for critical medical decisions, and for medical research and quality review. In 2024: **2,784 unique VAAES health factors** were captured **508 million times** and:

496,966 ADMISSION ASSESSMENTS

6.5 MILLION SHIFT ASSESSMENTS

7.34 MILLION FREQUENT ASSESSMENTS

869,240 IV ASSESSMENTS AND INSERTS

960,135 ORAL CARE ASSESSMENTS

6.05 MILLION SKIN ASSESSMENTS

77,788 MENTAL HEALTH ADMISSION ASSESSMENTS

22.3 MILLION TOTAL ASSESSMENTS

WERE COMPLETED!




For the second year in a row, VA facilities were included in the CMS Overall Hospital Star Ratings and **received higher star ratings on average than non-VA hospitals!**

ALL EMPLOYEE NURSING SURVEY

In the 2024 All Employee Nursing Survey, the nursing workforce reported:



6.6%
decrease in nurses reporting **"high burnout."**

90%
of RNs have a **positive opinion of the quality of care** delivered to patients in their workgroup.

89%
of RNs say that physicians and nurses have **good working relationships**.

The latest VA nursing album, **“From the Battlefield to the Bedside: Honoring VA Nurses Who Served in Combat,”** debuted during Nurses Month 2024. It features the following songs by nurses:



“EVERY LIFE WE SAVE”
Steve Corl, RN



“THE BOX”
Shawn Donald, RN



“EARTH MOVERS”
Renee Langone, BSN, RN, CCRN



“SELFESS SERVICE”
Patrick Ragland, BSN, RN



“PELELIU”
Christina Christiansen, BSN, RN



“BATTLEFIELD TO THE BEDSIDE”
Katie Lunning, MSN, RN

Check out the music video for Katie Lunning’s song, **From the Battlefield to the Bedside**, which shares her journey as a combat Army nurse to serving her fellow Veterans as a VA nurse.



“I WAS THE ONE”
Serena Haughbrook, MSN, RN, CNL



“BATTLE ON”
Adam Herr, MSN, RN



“I LEARNED TO LAUGH”
Rachel Blankenship, BSN, RN, CEN, AMB-BC



“ZAHARA”
Michelle Dolan, MBA, BSN, RN

From the Battlefield to the Bedside



Veteran and nurse Patrick Ragland (left) becomes emotional on stage as Steven Dean, co-founder of Freedom Sings USA, performs the song inspired by his story.

Listen to 10 VA nurses’ stories of sacrifice, service, and triumph. These nurses, who are also Veterans, represent the VA values of dedication, caring, and excellence. VA has partnered with the nonprofit Freedom Sings USA for several years to help nurses tell their stories through song. Over several weeks, including a retreat in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, these nurses engaged with acclaimed songwriters and volunteers to create and present original music. This creative process captured their military experiences and their contributions as VA nurses. Notably, some nurses also participated in virtual sessions, utilizing digital platforms to co-write their songs and ensuring nurses’ unique stories and perspectives were integrated into this heartfelt project.



VA nurses join Freedom Sings USA songwriters and performers on stage, celebrating the power of music and storytelling.

Freedom Sings nursing albums are gaining popularity.

During Nurses Month, compared to last year, there was a **32%** increase in **video viewership** and a **20%** rise in **album plays**

LISTEN TO THE ALBUM!



VIDEO SPOTLIGHT: FREEDOM SINGS USA



Watch the album’s making-of and learn how the creative process between Veteran nurses and songwriters works.



Nurses at Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System embrace peace, love, and sunshine as they celebrate Nurses Month with joy and camaraderie!

Nurses Month 2024:

Celebrating the Heart of VA Health Care

Every May, ONS shines a spotlight on the nation’s largest health care profession: nurses! At VA, Nurses Month is our time to celebrate the incredible contributions of more than 121,000 VA nurses who go above and beyond every day. Last year’s theme, “Advancing Nursing and Transforming Health Care,” perfectly captured their vital role. VA nurses consistently earn top marks in patient satisfaction, and it’s easy to see why Veterans trust them so deeply. From coast to coast, VAMCs hosted events to say a big “thank you” to our nursing superstars. Here’s to another year of excellence and innovation!

NOTABLE NURSES MONTH MOMENTS



30%

increase in **Sharepoint visits** from 2023



62

educational events were held



25

CEUs were made available



50+

nursing stories were shared to highlight the incredible work of VA nurses.

A **live broadcast** featured Deputy U.S. Surgeon General Rear Admiral Denise Hinton and Chief Nurse Officer Rear Admiral Jennifer Moon.



VIDEO SPOTLIGHT: FROM THE HEART: VA LEADERS THANK NURSES



In this video message, Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shareef Elnahal; Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services and CNO Dr. Chris Saslo; and Executive Director of the Office of Nursing Services and Deputy CNO Dr. Jennifer Strawn share nursing successes and express their gratitude for the dedication and hard work of VA nurses.



Celebrating Success

VA Secretary's Awards in Nursing Excellence



Sandra Citty receives the Excellence in Nursing in the Registered Nurse Staff Role Award from VA Secretary Denis McDonough at the annual Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing in May 2024. In attendance were Dr. Saslo, Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services/Chief Nursing Officer, Dr. Steven L. Lieberman, Deputy Under Secretary for Health, and Dr. Strawn, Executive Director of ONS and Deputy Chief Nursing Officer.



Excellence in Nursing in the Registered Nurse/Staff Role

Lawrence Racsa, MSN, RN, CCRN, CRRN, SCRN, CNRN

VA Maryland Health Care System, Baltimore, Maryland

For tirelessly advocating for his patients and his involvement in initiatives such as the "Get to Know Me Board" and the "VS 30 Diffusion Project."



Excellence in the Nursing Assistant or Health Care Technician Role

Josephine Loring, NA

VA Portland Health Care System, Portland, Oregon

For her extraordinary care and compassion caring for Veterans facing severe mental health crises and neurocognitive decline.

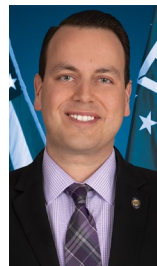


Excellence in Nursing in the Registered Nurse/Staff Role

Sandra Citty, Ph.D., APRN, RN, CNE

North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health Care System, Gainesville, Florida

For innovative solutions to health care challenges, including the enhancement of colorectal cancer screenings through new protocols.

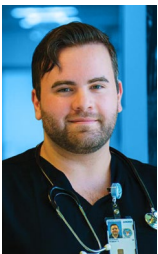


Advancement of Nursing Programs in the Medical Director Role

Walt Dannenberg, MHA, MBA, FACHE

VA Long Beach Healthcare System, Long Beach, California

For promoting A3 thinking, reshaping problem-solving methodologies, and empowering nurses to make meaningful changes that resulted in unparalleled care and service excellence for Veterans.



Excellence in the Licensed Practical Nurse Role

Robert Acevedo, LPN

Salisbury VA Health Care System, Salisbury, North Carolina

For his initiative to make dermatology education more inclusive, addressing a crucial gap by introducing materials that cater to Veterans with melanin-rich skin tones.



Advancement of Nursing Programs in the Nurse Executive Role

Carrie Hawkins, MS, RN, CCRN-K, NEA-BC

Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, Bay Pines, Florida

For fostering a culture of excellence where nursing retention rates soared, and innovative recruitment strategies were implemented.

Professional Highpoints



First VA Nurse President-Elect of the AACN

Cynthia Murray, BN, RN, AMB-BD

Wilmington VAMC, Wilmington, Delaware



Distinguished Educator in Gerontological Nursing by the National Hartford Center of Gerontological Nursing Excellence (NHCGNE)

Letha Joseph, DNP, AGPCNP-BC, FAANP

Durham VA Health Care System, Durham, North Carolina



2024 MIT Catalyst Fellow

Danielle Hallman, DNP, RN, NE-BC
Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, Bay Pines, Florida



2024 APNA Award for Excellence in Practice-APR

Helen Rodriguez-Romanacce, DNP, APRN, PMHNP-BC, FNP-C
Miami VAMC, Miami, Florida



New Hampshire Magazine Nurse Innovator-Entrepreneur and Quality Improvement Award

Mona Lavalliere, MSN-NI, RN
Manchester VAMC, Manchester, New Hampshire



New Hampshire Magazine Nurse Innovator-Entrepreneur and Quality Improvement Award

Crystal Geoffroy, MSN, RN
Manchester VAMC, Manchester, New Hampshire



2024 Awe-Inspiring Utilization Management Reviewer of the Year Award

Lanita Fortenberry, Utilization Management Consultant
VA Tampa Health Care, Tampa, Florida



Atlanta VA Healthcare System's Nurse Practitioner of the Year

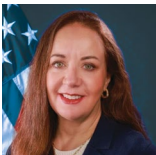
U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Nurse Officer Cashmere Miller, DNP, APRN, FNP-C
VA Atlanta Health Care, Decatur, Georgia

American Association of Practitioners® (AANP) Honors

Fellows of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (FAANP) 2024 Inductee



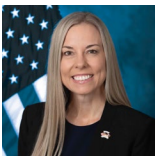
Kimberlee Bayless, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC, FAANP
VA Salt Lake City Health Care, Salt Lake City, Utah



Janet G. Campbell DNP, ANP-BC, ACNS, FAANP
VA Office of Academic Affiliations



Maria Lanzi, MS, MPH, ANP-BC, COHN-S, CTH, FAANP
VHA Office of VA/Department of Defense Health Affairs



Michelle Peacock, MSN, FNP-BC, FAANP
VA Office of Academic Affiliations



James L. Sall PhD, FNP-BC, FAANP
Office of Quality and Patient Services, Veteran Affairs Central Office



FAANP 2024 Inductee/Elected to AANP Board of Directors

Jason Gleason, DNP, NP-C, USAF LIEUTENANT COLONEL (RET), FAANP
VA Montana Health Care System, Fort Harrison, Montana



2024 Recipient of the AANP Towers Pinnacle Award

Kahlil Demonbreun, DNP, RNC-OB, WHNP-BC, ANP-BC, FAANP, FAAN
VA Columbia South Carolina Health Care, Columbia, South Carolina



Elected to AANP Board of Directors

Colleen Walsh-Irwin, DNP, ANP-BC, AACC, EBP-C, FAANP
ONS, Veterans Affairs Central Office



State Excellence Award

Juliana Hall, DNP, APRN, ANP-BC
VA Southern Arizona Health Care, Tucson, Arizona



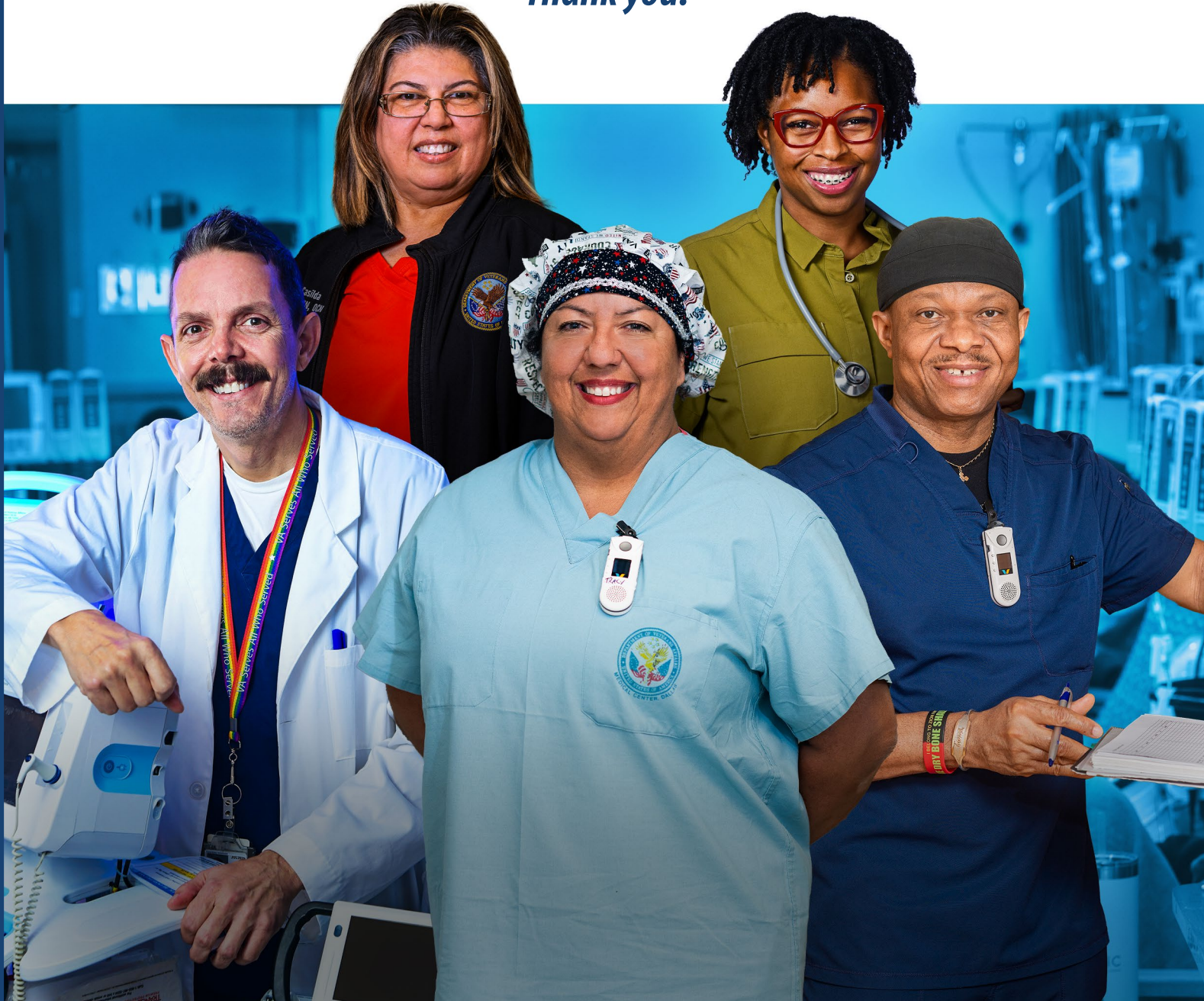
State Excellence Award

Suzanne Thorne-Odem, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, PMHNP-BC
ONS, Veterans Affairs Central Office

To VHA nurses:

We dedicate this Annual Report to you, the heart of VA health care. Thank you for all that you do to support Veterans and one another. All the photos in this report are of VA nurses who are demonstrating their care and commitment to our primary mission of caring for Veterans.

Thank you!



Special thanks to:

- Jeff Bowen, Medical Photographer, Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System
- Canaan Brumley, Public Affairs Specialist, Central Texas Veterans Health Care System
- Bruce M. Morris, Medical Photographer, VA Medical Center Dallas

And to all the talented photographers who helped highlight the dedication of VHA nurses—your invaluable contributions are deeply appreciated.

VA



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Veterans Health Administration