



## SAVAHCS Director's Report

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Director

**March 2025**

### [Hot Topics](#)

### [Community Engagements and Partnerships](#)

### [Construction Updates](#)

### [Health Care Information](#)

### [Local Contacts](#)

### [VA National Contacts](#)

### Hot Topics

## SAVAHCS has Arizona's First Licensed VA Medical Foster Home in the History of the State

Congratulations to the SAVAHCS Medical Foster Home Program for their hard work in achieving this historical milestone. We have an amazing Medical Foster Home Program at the SAVAHCS. The SAVAHCS Medical Foster Program is dedicated to providing the highest quality services for our Veterans. To learn more about the VA Medical Foster Home Program, visit [Medical Foster Homes - Geriatrics and Extended Care](#) web page.

**TUCSON VETERAN**  
Stand Down and Career Fair  
Ramada Inn 777 W. Cushing St. ★★★★★

**Veteran Stand Down March 5**  
from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

**and Career Fair March 6**  
from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

\* Please bring extra copies of your resume; business casual attire for the career fair

**Open to ALL Veterans, National Guard and Reservists**

## Tucson Veteran Stand Down and Career Fair


The stand down is open to all Veterans, National Guard and Reservists in need of services, such as clothing items, housing options, mental health, substance abuse counseling, legal matters, employment assistance, and disability claims. The event will be held March 5 and 6 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. each day at the Ramada Inn on 777 W. Cushing St.



## Women Veteran Tele-Town Hall

Save the date for SAVAHCS Women Veterans Tele-Town Hall, which will be held on Thursday, March 6, 2025, from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The event will be live streamed at [www.facebook.com/VATucson](http://www.facebook.com/VATucson). You can also visit [access.live/womenshealth](http://access.live/womenshealth) or dial in at (833)380-0738.

**Tucson, Arizona  
March 6-8, 2025**



The Department of Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Phoenix Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Regional Office, Arizona Air National Guard, Pima Community College, American Legion, and CBP invite you to attend a Fast-Track Disability Claims Clinic.

Pre-event phone appointment recommended using the QR Code. No appointments are necessary. If you do not have a Veteran Identification Card, you must have a valid drivers license and DD214 to show military proof of service.

March 6-8, 2025, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. at the Pima Community College Aviation Technology Campus located at 7211 South Park Ave. Tucson AZ, 85756.

To Schedule Virtual Appointment:  
State/Province: Arizona  
Special Notes/Requests:  
US Customs and Border Protection Pass registration for MDEO Event (6-8 Mar 25)

## Veterans Fast-Track Disability Clinic

The claims clinic is open to all Veterans in need of assistance with VHA disability claims. The event will take place on March 6 - 8, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day at the Pima Community College Aviation Technology Campus located at 7211 South Park Ave., Tucson, AZ., please see attached flier for more information.

STARTS @ 10 AM      ENDS @ 2 PM

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**VETERANS  
STAND DOWN**

MARCH 20, 2025

## Yuma Veteran Town Hall and Stand Down

Join us on Thursday, March 20, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the VFW Post 1763 located at 2485 E. 14th Street, Yuma, AZ. The stand down will provide Veterans with resources and assistance with eligibility and enrollment, whole health, suicide prevention, women's health, and disability claims. For questions, email the SAVAHCS Public Affairs Office at [pao.savahcs@va.gov](mailto:pao.savahcs@va.gov).

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
**VIETNAM WAR  
COMMEMORATION**  
*honoring Service Valor Sacrifice*

## Vietnam War Commemoration 2025

SAVAHCS will be hosting a Vietnam Veteran Commemoration Day and Resource Fair in the Rose Garden Courtyard on Friday, March 28, 2025, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to honor our Vietnam Veterans. For questions, please email the SAVAHCS Public Affairs Office at [pao.savahcs@va.gov](mailto:pao.savahcs@va.gov).



Please join me in welcoming Ricardo (Rico) Huerta as the SAVAHCS Assistant Chief of Engineering!

Mr. Huerta has served as a Healthcare Engineer at the Phoenix VA for the past 2 years. During this time, he also served as Supervisory Healthcare Engineer (Projects) as well as Acting Chief of Engineering. Prior to the Veteran Administration, Mr. Huerta was a Veteran United State Air Force Communications Officer and Systems Engineer. He has extensive supervisory experience in large scale capital projects and oversight of

Department of Defense contracts as well as hardware and software installations for the casino gaming and mining industries. He possesses strong leadership background with proven ability to establish ground-up communications, tactical and operational communications, and surveillance and reconnaissance operations in combat theaters.

Mr. Huerta received his bachelor's degree in civil engineering, from Georgia Institute of Technology and an MBA from Idaho State University.

Welcome to the SAVAHCS team Mr. Huerta!

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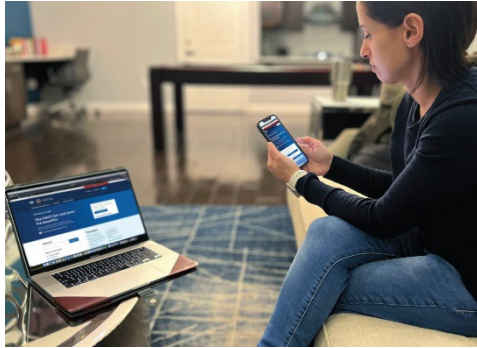
## New Travel Claims Form

VETERAN/BENEFICIARY CLAIM FOR REIMBURSEMENT OF TRAVEL EXPENSES	
<b>SECTION A. TRAVELER'S INFORMATION</b>	
1B. CLAIMANT'S SSN (999-99-9999)	
1C. CLAIMANT'S DATE OF BIRTH (MM/DD/YYYY)	
<i>3B, 3C and 3D if Caregiver, Attendant or Donor is checked</i>	
* Program <input type="checkbox"/> ATTENDANT (Medically authorized by VA) <input type="checkbox"/> DONOR (VA Transplant Care)	
3B. VETERAN'S SSN (999-99-9999)	
3C. VETERAN'S DATE OF BIRTH (MM/DD/YYYY)	
<b>SECTION B. TRIP INFORMATION</b>	
1B. DATE TRIP BEGAN (MM/DD/YYYY)	
1C. TRAVEL BY (e.g., car, train, bus, taxi)	

As a reminder, the old beneficiary travel voucher claim form has officially expired. The new forms are now out for use on the Beneficiary desk in the building 80 lobby near the Veteran Canteen Retail Store at the Tucson VA Medical Center. The forms can also be found online at <https://www.va.gov/find-forms/about-form-10-3542/>. For questions, call Beneficiary Travel at (520) 792-1450, extension 1-4626.

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## My HealtheVet on VA.gov Transition



The VA's patient portal, [My HealtheVet](#), is moving to [VA.gov](#). With the new **My HealtheVet on VA.gov** portal, Veterans will have a more secure, single online location to manage their health care and other VA benefits and services. As each new version of a My HealtheVet tool is completed, Veterans are testing it and sharing their feedback prior to the tool being moved permanently to the portal on [VA.gov](#).

As of January 31, 2025, Veterans will no longer be able to sign in using My HealtheVet user ID and password. The two-remaining sign-in options will be Login.gov, which offers streamlined setup and integration with other federal services like TSA Precheck and FEMA, and ID.me, which provides additional verification methods, including video calls, and can be used for military discounts.

If you or the Veterans you serve have questions about this change, please call the SAVAHCS Virtual Health Resource Center at (520) 629-1713 or send an email to [TucsonVHRC@va.gov](mailto:TucsonVHRC@va.gov).

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## VA Health Care available to Thousands of Southern Arizona Veterans

VA has expanded health care eligibility for Veterans exposed to toxins and hazards during service. As of March 5, 2024, eligible Veterans can enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for benefits. This includes Vietnam War, Gulf War, Post-9/11 combat Veterans, and those exposed during training or active duty in the U.S. Veterans are urged to get screened for toxic exposures, even if currently healthy. VA offers a quick 5-minute screening that could detect early signs of exposure-related conditions. Encourage Veterans to get screened today – their health may depend on it.

Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States will also be eligible to enroll, in one of the largest-ever expansions of Veteran health care ([va.gov](#)).

To enroll and schedule your screening, visit [VA.gov/PACT](#) or call 1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411). Take advantage of this expanded care and protect your health today.

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## Whole Health at SAVAHCS

Whole Health is VA's approach to care that supports the Veteran's or individual's health and well-being. This means the health care team develops a personalized health plan based on the Veteran's values, needs, and goals., and what's important to them.



We offer self-help skills and support to make the changes the Veteran wants through: [Mindful Awareness](#), [Moving the Body](#), [Personal Development](#), [Nutrition](#), [Spirit & Soul](#), [Power of the Mind](#) and more.

We're actively spreading the word so that more Veterans are aware and enroll in these services.

For more information about Whole Health classes and resources, Veterans can contact SAVAHCS at (520) 792-1450, extension 1-4971. They can also connect with health care teams via telephone or video appointments and utilize MyHealthVet for routine healthcare needs.

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### **SAVAHCS Outreach Engagement Efforts**

SAVAHCS Outreach is committed to reaching underserved Veteran populations in rural areas who are not yet enrolled in VA health care. Our efforts focus on ensuring these Veterans have access to the care and resources they deserve. However, we need the support of our community partners to help identify and connect with these Veterans.

If you know of any Veterans who need assistance or enrollment guidance, please reach out to our Public Affairs Office at (520) 629-1819 or via email at [pao.savahcs@va.gov](mailto:pao.savahcs@va.gov).

Together, we can make sure every Veteran gets the care they need.

#### Community Engagements & Partnerships



[\*\*National Salute to Veteran Patients Kickoff\*\*](#) started with Super Bowl parties in some of our residential patient areas on Sunday, February 9. Our Veterans patients enjoyed a classic football game-day experience thanks to our generous donors who provided refreshments.



[\*\*Smooch the Pooch Event\*\*](#) was held during our National Salute to Veteran Patients Week on Friday, February 14. Our Veterans got a warm welcome from furry, four-legged therapists who dished out slobbery kisses, wagging tails, and pure joy—proving that sometimes the best medicine comes with fur and a wet nose.



**Valentine's Day** marked the conclusion of our National Salute to Veteran Patients Week. Community partners joined SAVAHCS staff to distribute hand-drawn Valentine's Day cards from elementary and middle school students, along with flowers, to both inpatient and outpatient Veterans at the Tucson VA Medical Center.



**Tucson Navy Week** had more than 50 sailors, to include those with direct ties to Tucson, engaged in educating the local community about the important role of the U.S. Navy and participating community outreach events throughout the city to include the Tucson VA Medical Center.



**Vietnam War Commemoration Team** was at the Tucson VA Medical Center on Tuesday, February 18 honoring Vietnam Veterans in outpatient and inpatient clinics with commemorative coins and other items. The team expressed deep appreciation and gratitude to all Vietnam Veterans for their service and sacrifice.



**Vice Admiral Jimmy Pitts** met with SAVAHCS leadership to learn about the health care services we provide to Veterans on Friday, February 21. During a tour of our Southwestern Blind Rehabilitation Center (SWBRC), the admiral met and spoke with Veterans patients



**SAVAHCS Outreach Team** attended the 80th Annual Ira Hayes Parade on Saturday, February 22. The parade was a heartfelt tribute to the brave Code Talkers and service members who fought on Iwo Jima. The SAVAHCS Outreach Team shared information to Veterans about enrolling in VA healthcare.

**SAVAHCS Construction Updates**

**Mental Health Building 90 expansion project to increase existing Mental Health Facility Space:** Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) Mental Health Clinic construction phase is scheduled to be completed by the end of February for the start of equipment installation. Furniture installation projected by early March 2025.

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**Mental Health Building 90 renovation project to convert the Agave clinic into a Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT)-compliant layout:** Renovation portion of the project will start in the Agave Clinic followed by the Mental Health Primary Care Staff space. Agave Clinic staff will move to the PRRC Mental Health Clinic in end of March/mid-April 2025.

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**Auditorium Stage Renovations:** Upon the completion of the exterior Rose Garden stage, the Auditorium door will be installed. Tucson VA staff has use of the Auditorium starting February 2025 until June 2025 when the stage is complete. Projected end date of project is June 2025.

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**Roof Repair Projects:** Building 50, 60, 78 and 90 roofs have all been completed.

**Emergency Department (ED) Renovations and Expansion:** Lot G has three rows of parking spaces closed off until March 3. This work is impacting pedestrian traffic in Lot G. Upcoming events in March are the drilling of the building adjacent structural caissons in the construction site and impending removal of the outer concrete wall in the waiting room corridor 1C1 on the East side of B50.

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**Expand and Renovate Clinics Bldg. 80:** Project will be completing a pipe installation to the existing southwest side of Bldg. 80. The sidewalk leading to the south entrance of building will be repoured. Engineering will provide updates to announce when the east entrance will be closed off and fence installed around the construction site.

Veteran Health Care Information

### **WWII Veterans' new eligibility for VA Health Care**

If you served in World War II and are not currently enrolled in VA health care, this recent legislation ensures that you are now eligible for VA health care. WWII is defined as the period beginning December 7, 1941, and ending December 31, 1946. The Cleland-Dole Act was signed into law December 29, 2022. Section 101 of this law expands eligibility for VA care for Veterans of World War II. Apply today, even if you applied before and your application was not approved. Income level and service length do not matter. WWII Veterans will be at minimum in Priority Group 6. You could be in a higher priority group if you have other eligibilities. Even if you were deferred before, please consider applying again. Please note, you must apply for VA health care if you are not currently enrolled. VA cannot automatically enroll Veterans in VA health care.

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## **Cleland-Dole: Mental Health Copay Exemption**

Good news for Veterans who owe [copays](#) for outpatient mental health and substance use disorder visits. VA is canceling and refunding the first three mental health and substance use disorder copays in each calendar year between June 27, 2023, and December 29, 2027. Click [HERE](#) to learn more.

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**The PACT Act** expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances, helping to provide generations of Veterans and their survivors with the care and benefits they have earned and deserve.

As of February 23, the SAVAHCS has screened over 56,800 Veterans for toxic exposures.

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## **COMPACT Act**

Veterans in acute suicidal crisis can go to a VA or community health care facility to receive free emergency health care – including ambulance transportation costs – and can be eligible for inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days and outpatient care for up to 90 days, including social work. This change was made possible by the Veterans COMPACT Act of 2020. For more information contact the COMPACT Act Coordinator Office at (520) 203-2191.

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## **SERVICE Act**

Signed into law in August 2022, the SERVICE Act focuses on the health effects of toxic exposures. While the PACT Act expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic-exposures and certain Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 eras, the SERVICE ACT focuses on ensuring that VA policy permits Veterans deployed to certain locations during certain periods of time to be eligible for a breast cancer risk assessment and mammography screening for breast cancer if a risk is found. For Veterans already using VA health care, see your primary care provider to assess your risk for breast cancer. If you're not already enrolled or using VA health care, go to <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply> for more information.

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## **Veterans Crisis Line Number**

Dial 988, then Press 1- Veterans in crisis or those concerned about a Veteran can call to reach trained responders 24 hours a day, seven days a week to receive confidential crisis support.

Veterans can still call 1 (800) 273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at Chat ([www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net)) and text 838255 to reach trained crisis responders.

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## **Veterans can use the latest technology to connect with their health care teams.**

Veterans who have questions on how to use virtual technology health care options may reach out to the Virtual Health Resource Center (VHRC) at (520) 629-1713, email [TucsonVHRC@va.gov](mailto:TucsonVHRC@va.gov) or visit the center at the main facility in Bldg. 80 on the second floor. Hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Telephone or Video Appointments - Veterans may receive care at home, either over the phone or via video using VA Video Connect on their computers, smartphones, or tablets. Visit <http://www.mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect> or contact the VHRC to learn more.

Veterans can save time by using MyHealthVet, the VA patient portal, for all their routine healthcare needs. Veterans can make medical appointments, contact providers, and request prescription refills. To learn more, contact the VHRC team at (520) 792-1450, extension 1-6889.

Prescription Refills - Veterans may request prescription refills, order, and have medications mailed to their homes using My HealthVet or the VA Health and Benefits mobile app, which can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store or by visiting <https://mobile.va.gov/>. Veterans may also order prescriptions via phone at (800) 470-8262 (press 1).

Veterans can contact the VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network (VISN 22) Nurse Advice Line at (877) 252-4866. Veterans can call 24/7 to speak with a registered nurse for any routine health care questions over the phone.

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## **Did You Know?**

Veterans can view primary care, mental health, and specialty care appointment wait times by VHA facility at the VA Access to Care website at <https://www.accesstocare.va.gov>.

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## **Stand up to your fear of falling.**

A Matter of Balance is an evidence-based program that emphasizes practical strategies to reduce fear of falling and increase activity levels. Participants view falls and fear of falling as controllable, set realistic goals to increase activity, change their environment to reduce fall risk factors, and exercise to increase strength and balance. A simple exercise routine that is designed to be helpful in fall prevention is introduced in session three. The group meets for eight, two-hour sessions over four weeks. To learn more, contact Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R) at 520-629-4887.

### **SAVAHCS Local Contacts:**

- Southern Arizona VA Health Care System Main Line (520) 792-1450 or 1 (800) 470-8262
- Caregiver Support Program (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-5390
- Care in the Community (520) 792-1450, extension, 1- 6555
- Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) (formerly Voluntary Services) (520) 629-1822
- Compensation and Pension (520) 629-4662
- Eligibility and Enrollment Section (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-6572 or 1-1740
- Homeless Program Coordinator (520) 792-1540, extension, 1-1839
- Medication Automated Refill Line (Toll Free) 1 (800) 470-8262, Press 1, then press 1 again to use the automated line to refill/renew a prescription
- Mental Health Clinic (520) 629-4884
- Virtual Health Resource Center (520) 629-1713 (for assistance with My HealthVet and other virtual care technologies)
- Native American Program (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-6622
- Patient Advocate Office (520) 629-4933
- Public Affairs (520) 629-1819
- Release of Information Office (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-4665
- Suicide Prevention Coordinator (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-6415
- Post-9/11 M2VA Case Management for Veterans recently separated from military (520) 269-1684
- Women's Health Clinic (520) 629-4885

- 1 (800) MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411) for all VA related questions about care, benefits, and services
  - General VA Billing Questions 1 (866) 400-1238
- National Caregiver support line 1 (855) 260-3274
- National Memorial Cemetery Phoenix (480) 513-1412
- Phoenix Regional Office (VBA) 1 (800) 827-1000 VA Billing and collections Consolidated Patient Account Center (CPAC) 866-802-6819
- VA Health Care (877) 222-8387 (VETS)
- VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Nurse Advice Line 1 (877) 252-4866

