



## SAVAHCS Director's Report

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Director

## May 2024

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## Hot Topics

### Patient Experience (PX) Week

April 29 - May 3, 2024, is Patient Experience (PX) Week!

SAVAHCS will be holding a PX Fair in the Rose Garden on May 1, 2024, from 10:00am to 2:00 pm. Representatives from SAVAHCS patient programs will be there to share information with Veterans and staff highlighting how their services can enhance Veteran lives.

### SAVAHCS Caregiver Support Program Summit

Will be held on Friday, May 3, this is open to any health care organization, VSO's, hospice and home health agencies, tribal organizations, congressional offices, etc.

For more information, visit the link below:

<https://www.va.gov/southern-arizona-health.../events/67483/>



Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS)

### CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM SUMMIT

*Beyond the Caregiving Role: Seeing the "Whole" Caregiver*

Scan here to attend virtually:

Friday, May 3, 2024  
8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Tucson VA, Auditorium, Building 4  
3601 S. 6th Ave, Tucson AZ

For questions regarding the Summit, please contact SAVAHCS Caregiver Support Coordinator Anna Sooi, LCSW  
Anna.Sooi@VA.gov

## SAVAHCS to Offer Free Naloxone Kits, Medication Disposal Bags on National Fentanyl Awareness Day

To enrolled Veterans on May 7, at a booth in the building 80 lobby from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Veterans who are unable to attend the event but still need a naloxone kit can contact SAVAHCS at 520-792-1450, extension 1-6581.

## SAVAHCS 14th Annual National VA2K Walk & Roll

Will be held on Wednesday, May 15, to encourage healthy living and to support the Homeless Program. For more information, please visit [va.gov/wholehealth/va2k](http://va.gov/wholehealth/va2k).

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## Volunteers Needed

The Center for Development and Civic Engagement is recruiting volunteers for various positions throughout the facility. Come show your support for Veterans by volunteering in one of our many opportunities:

- Ambassador Patient Transportation (Help escort Veterans to their appointments)
- Van Drivers from Yuma or Casa Grande to our main campus in Tucson
- In-Home Visitor Program Volunteers/Compassionate Contact Corp
- Blind Rehab Recreation Activities Assistants
- Chaplain Office Assistant
- Concierge Information desk
- Comfort Cart Attendant (Bring comfort items to inpatients.)
- Van Drivers to provide local transportation for our Blind Rehab Veterans
- Emergency Department Assistant to charge nurse on duty (Open 24/7)
- HUD/VASH & Homeless Administrative Assistant
- Primary Care Patient Administrative Assistant (mailings)
- Yoga instructors (please inquire for specifics)

For more information, please email [TucsonCDCE@va.gov](mailto:TucsonCDCE@va.gov) or contact our Volunteer On-Boarding Specialist, Kristina Blake, at (520) 629- 1822 or email [kristina.blake@va.gov](mailto:kristina.blake@va.gov).

**MAY 7 NATIONAL FENTANYL AWARENESS DAY**  
Be Part of the Solution. Save a Life

On National Fentanyl Awareness Day, May 7, the Southern Arizona Veterans Health Care System (SAVAHCS) will offer free naloxone kits and medication disposal bags to enrolled Veterans at a booth in the building 80 lobby from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Naloxone is a medication that can rapidly reverse an opioid overdose. Having naloxone available can save a life in the event of an opioid overdose.

In addition to naloxone kits, SAVAHCS will also be providing medication disposal bags. These bags allow Veterans to safely dispose of unused or expired medications at home.

Veterans who are unable to attend the event but still need a naloxone kit can contact SAVAHCS at 520-792-1450, ext. 6581.

**SAVAHCS 14th Annual National VA2K WALK & ROLL**  
Encouraging Healthy Living & Supporting Homeless Veterans  
Wednesday, May 15, 2024

**VCS**  
Veterans Center Service

- Body Wash/Washcloth
- Cleaners/Sprays
- Deodorant
- Disposable Razors
- Jackets
- Non-perishable Food
- Shampoo
- Shave Cream
- Shoes
- Small Household Items
- Toothbrush/Toothpaste
- Undergarments (all sizes)

VA  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Southern Arizona Veterans Health Care System

More info at [va.gov/wholehealth/va2k](http://va.gov/wholehealth/va2k)

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**VA Expanding Health Care Eligibility to Millions of Veterans**

VA announced that all Veteran who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military, at home or abroad, will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care beginning March 5, 2024. This means that all Veteran who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11 will be eligible to enroll without first applying for VA benefits. 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)

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## ARP Refund Overpayments

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) period was April 6, 2020 – September 30, 2021. During that period VHA suspended all statement billing for Veterans. VHA resumed the mailing of patient statements to Veterans in October 2021. Veterans should have not received any billing statement that contains a charge for a medical service received during the pandemic period. Any payments that VHA received for a copayment charge for care provided during the ARP period were refunded to those Veterans.

As refunds were processed there was a computer error that duplicated some refunds. By federal statute and CFR regulations, VHA is required to recoup money erroneously paid to a payee. West Consolidated Patient Account Center (WCPAC) has been tasked to create the letters and Bills of Collection. WCPAC has begun to send the letters and Bills of Collection to Veterans who received a duplicate refund.

For any questions or assistance please contact:

- MyHealthyVet: – TUC BILLING & ELIGIBILITY
- Customer Service Phone:
  - Local: (520) 792-1450 extension 1-5487
  - National HRC: (866) 802-6819
- Walk-In: SAVAHCS Main Campus Building 50, Room 157

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## Whole Health

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.





[Douglas Spring Veterans Stand Down](#) was attended by our SAVAHCS Outreach Team. The outreach team provided information and resources on Suicide Prevention, Eligibility and Enrollment, Environmental Registry, and the Minority Veterans Program to Veterans and their family members – April 3.

[AMVET Riders 770](#) made a generous monetary donation for SAVAHCS hospice patients being treated in our Community Living Center. Thank you AMVET Riders 770 for all your generosity – April 3.

[Christ Presbyterian Church](#) delivered 60 cases of water. This will be used by Fisher House, Patriot Pantry and anywhere else it is needed here at SAVAHCS. Thank you, Christ Presbyterian Church, for such an important donation and supporting our Veterans – April 3.

[SAVAHCS held a Last Roll Call Ceremony](#) to honor the Veterans who have passed between October 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023. We are eternally grateful for their service and sacrifice, and we honor those Veterans on their final deployment in peace – April 12.

[SAVAHCS Laboratory Staff](#) and their families kicked off Medical Laboratory Professionals Week with a 5k around the Tucson VA campus on a beautiful Sunday morning. Our laboratory staff play a key role in establishing diagnoses, fine-tuning treatments, and aiding in our mission to provide world-class health care to our Veterans - April 14.

[Nearly 60 riders from the American Legion, Sons of the American Legion, and American Legion Auxiliary](#) from around Arizona presented a generous donation to the Fisher House through the CHAMP (Charities Helping American Military Patriots) Foundation. [Click the link for full story](#) – April 14.

[Veteran Ysidro Ruiz celebrated his 100th Birthday](#) SAVAHCS staff gathered with Veteran Ruiz and presented him with a centenarian certificate signed by VA Secretary Denis McDonough. We wish Veteran Ruiz a happy birthday and are grateful for his service – April 16.



[The 14th Annual Military Families](#)

[Arizona Coalition Statewide](#)

[for](#)





[Symposium](#) was attended by SAVAHCS Director Jennifer Gutowski and staff. The symposium brings together military, government, and community organizations for professional development and networking to better support Veterans, service members, and their families – April 17.

[SAVAHCS Adaptive Sports Clinic](#) was held in partnership with [Southern Arizona Adaptive Sports](#). Veterans and family members were able to test out specialized sporting equipment and learn to use them in the training clinics offered. Thank you to the staff, volunteers and [Southern Arizona Adaptive Sports](#) for making this a great learning opportunity for our Veterans. [Click here to watch video](#) – April 17.

[Raytheon Operations Quality Team](#) socialized and served Veterans in the Tucson VA's Community Living Center over games of bingo and bowls of ice cream. SAVAHCS thanks our volunteers for their heart-warming support that didn't melt the ice cream – April 22.

[Denim Day](#) takes place on the last Wednesday of April, which is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This day of action and awareness is an event in which people are encouraged to wear denim to combat victim blaming and educate others about sexual violence – April 24.

[SAVAHCS Volunteers Make a World of Difference](#) We thank all our volunteers for the tremendous support they provide our Veterans and staff. “Our volunteers come together for one common cause to serve our Veterans and Heroes,” said Kimmy Kamerer, Center of Development and Community Engagement Service Chief for SAVAHCS – April 24.

[SAVAHCS Youth Volunteer of the Year Aryan Malik](#) is a shining example of enthusiasm and has brightened the days of Veterans at SAVAHCS. Aryan has volunteered over 208 hours through the SERVE Program since 2022. Read the rest of the story [here](#) – April 24.

[SAVAHCS Female Volunteer of the Year Marilyn Zabowski](#) has ensured Veterans feel comfortable and cared for through the In-Home Visitor Program. Marilyn's dedication is evident in her incredible 6,780+ volunteer hours since 2016. Read the rest of the story [here](#) – April 24.



**SAVAHCS Male Volunteer of the Year Bob Mayfield** serves as a valuable member of the SAVAHCS Hero's Welcome Program, donating over 330



hours of his time since 2019. Bob makes sure the needs of every inpatient Veteran are met. Read the rest of the story [here](#) – April 24.

**[A Day of Remembrance: SAVAHCS Honors Holocaust Survivors](#)** our Jewish Holocaust Remembrance Special Emphasis Program Managers hosted a moving ceremony for Holocaust Remembrance Day. We were deeply honored to hear the powerful story of resilience and courage from Mr. Hellpap, a Holocaust survivor, and US Army Veteran. Let us never forget the victims and continue to honor the survivors – April 24.

## SAVAHCS Updates and Accomplishments

### Watchman Implant

Last month our first Watchman Device implant was performed at SAVAHCS. The WATCHMAN™ is a small parachute-shaped device about the size of a quarter that prevents blood clots from forming in the left atrial appendage (LAA) and allows patients with atrial fibrillation to not need blood thinners. The operators were Ji Eun Park, MD and George Revtyak, MD.

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**Tucson Nurses Week Foundation** honored it's Fabulous 50 and the area's top 5 LPNs. From SAVAHCS were—

Our Fabulous 50 Nurses included:

Kristy Aguirre, Sharon Chandler, Ashley Cole, Alicia Guill, Carol Hart, Lisa Logan, Stephanie Malone, Richelle Nixon, Killeen Ricks and Bernadette Smith.

Then, among the Top-5 LPNs are:

Daniel Korchmaros, Patricia Miller and Matthew Zubicki.

They will be recognized at this year's Tucson Nurses Week Foundation Gala Saturday, May 11 and at a SAVAHCS awards ceremony during Nurses Week (May 6 - 12).

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### VA Medical Center receives 75 new housing vouchers

Social worker **Angie Hamilton** talked to KGUN about SAVAHCS continuing to exceed our homeless housing numbers as striving for zero homeless Veterans in Tucson.

<https://www.kgun9.com/news/local-news/va-medical-center-receives-75-new-housing-vouchers-for-tucson-homeless-veterans>



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Congratulations to [U.S. Army](#) Veteran Erik Castillo

Also, an Advanced Medical Support Specialist here at SAVAHCS. Veteran Castillo earned the 2024 [DAV](#) Freedom Award at the 38th annual National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, which was hosted by [Adaptive Sports and Arts - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#) in Snowmass, Colo.

Thank you, Veteran Castillo, for sharing your inspiring story, and congratulations from your SAVAHCS family! Watch the full video interview [here](#).

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### **SAVAHCS Mobile Medical Unit (MMU) has arrived**

SAVAHCS homeless patient aligned care team (HPACT) will be able to go out and do more outreach to a designated population of Veterans.

“For those Veterans who aren't willing to come onto campus, it gives us the ability to go out and take care of them,” said Lucretia Vaughan, Associate Chief of Staff, Mental Health. “Our goal will be to build trust between unsheltered Veterans and VA.” Read the rest of the story [here](#).

[Short video of MMU arrival.](#)

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### **The American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE)**

Recently recognized SAVAHCS' Assistant Director [Jenny Wasielewski](#) with the 2024 award for Federal Excellence in Healthcare Management.

The [ACHE](#) is an international professional society of more than 49,000 healthcare executives who lead hospitals, healthcare systems and other healthcare organizations.

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### **SAVAHCS Million Veteran Program hits 19,000 Veteran Participants**

The Million Veteran Program at SAVHCS has achieved a remarkable milestone, we just hit 19,000 Veteran participants. Thank you to all the Veterans who put their Veteran family first and participated in such an important research initiative.

Learn more & join today at [www.mvp.va.gov](http://www.mvp.va.gov).

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**PACT Act** has expanded 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 April 29, we have screened over 49,700 Veterans for Toxic Exposure Screenings.

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### **Standing Ready to Serve Veterans' Spiritual Needs**

Amidst one of the most sacred religious times of year with Lent, Passover and Ramadan, Southern Arizona Health Care System (SAVAHCS) shines a light on the work their Chaplains do for Veterans. Read the rest of the story [here](#).

## SAVAHCS Construction Updates

**Exterior building painting completed for buildings 94 and 90:** This project includes a total of 10 buildings - 2, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 57, 90, and 94.

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**Upgrade controls and mixer boxes in buildings 38 (1st floor), 50 (2nd floor), and 57 (1st floor):** Work is taking place above the ceilings during nights and weekends.

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**Expanding the Mental Health Clinic in building 90 (13,000 square feet):** Building 90's expansion project for Outpatient Mental Health begins its transition to phase two! The first phase expanded the northwest side of Building 90 by approximately 7,600 square feet. On Monday, February 26, installation began for new furniture and equipment as well as other various finishing touches. The new space is slated to be fully usable and available for move-in by the end of March. Completion of the project is currently planned for late 2024.

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**Auditorium Stage Renovations** The renovations on the building 4 Auditorium are underway. As a result, the outside sitting area will be **closed-off until May 20**. Temporary fencing and signs will be placed around the area.

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**Mental Health building 90 renovation project will start in September 2023 to convert the Agave clinic into a Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) compliant layout:** This project will also renovate the lobby and common hallway.

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**Roof Repair Projects on Roofs B50, 60, 78 and 90,** will continue Phase 1 of Bldg. 90. There will be 2 areas coned off in the back loading area for storing material and loading material to the roof. Please stay clear of these areas and follow the instructions of the ground guides for your own safety.

Work on the roof Bldg. 90 will continue Tuesday to Friday, through the end of June.

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**Emergency Department Expansion:** The design is complete. Construction funding has been tentatively approved for FY24.

## Veteran Health Care Information

**American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans Copayment Exemption**



American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans serve at a higher rate compared to any other group of Veterans. To honor these Veterans and treaties with sovereign nations, eligible Native Veterans no longer have a copayment when receiving VA health care and are eligible for retroactive refunds for copayments for VA health care services (inpatient, outpatient, urgent care, and prescriptions) provided on or after January 5, 2022. To apply for VA health care, call us at 877-222-8387.

Learn more about eligibility and how to apply for your exemption: <https://www.va.gov/resources/copay-exemptions-for-american-indian-and-alaska-native-veterans/>

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## **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 you in VA care.

VA Priority Groups | Veterans Affairs

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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 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 Suicide Prevention Coordination Office at (520) 792-1450 extension 1-6145 or 1-4415.

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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 New 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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### **VA Mobile Check-In for Appointments**

Veterans can now check in to their appointments at the SAVAHCS with their smart phones by scanning a QR code on the mobile check-in poster in the clinic lobby or text “check-in” to 53079 and a link to complete the check-in process will be sent.

Veterans can learn more at [How to check in with your smartphone for some VA appointments](#).

If Veterans do not have a smart phone or need help checking in for an appointment, staff at the front desk will check in Veterans to their appointments and answer any questions.

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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 options may reach out to their primary care team.

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 [mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect](http://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect) or call your primary care team to learn more.

Veterans can save time by using MyHealthVet for all their routine healthcare needs. Veterans can make medical appointments, contact providers, and request prescription refills. To learn more, contact the SAVAHCS MyHealthVet Coordinator 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 Rx Refill mobile app. Download the app at [va.gov/app/rx-refill](http://va.gov/app/rx-refill), or call 1-800-470-8262 and press 1.

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network (VISN 22) Nurse Advice Line at 1-877-252-4866- 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?**

Primary Care, Mental Health, and Specialty Care appointment wait times by VHA facility can be found at the newly updated 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 Rogan Adams at (520) 792-1450, Ext. 14051 for more information.

#### SAVAHCS Local Contacts:

- Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) Main Line 520-792-1450 or 1-800-470-8262
- Caregiver Support Program 520-792-1450 extension 5390
- Care in the Community 520-792-1450 extension 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 6572 or 1740
- Homeless Program Coordinator 520-792-1540 extension 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
- My HealtheVet 520-792-1450 extension 6889
- Native American Program 520-792-1450 extension 6622
- Patient Advocate Office 520-629-4933
- Public Affairs 520-629-1819
- Release of Information Office 520-792-1450 extension 4665
- Suicide Prevention Coordinator 520-792-1450 extension 6415
- Post-9/11 M2VA Case Management for Veterans recently separated from military 520-269-1684
- Women's Health Clinic 520-629-4885

#### VA National Contacts



- 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