



March 2024 SAVAHCS Director's Report

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Director

Hot Topics



Fisher House Open House – Veterans, family members, caregivers, Veteran Service Organizations, please join us on Friday, March 15, 2024, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Meet our Fisher House team, take a tour, and learn about the eligibility criteria for Veteran family members to utilize the Fisher House.



Virtual Veteran Engagement & Resource Fair – Please join us for our virtual event on Monday, March 18, 2024, from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Where we will provide Director updates, information on the new Toxic Exposure eligibility, Women's Health, and Whole Health. For advance questions, please email the SAVAHCS Public Affairs Office at pao.savahcs@va.gov. Microsoft Teams link [Click here to join the meeting](#).



SAVAHCS Mental Health Open House - Please join us for our quarterly Mental Health Open House on Wednesday, March 27, 2024, from 10:00 a.m. to noon. The presentation will be in-person in Building 4 Auditorium and virtual through WebEx. Please RSVP by calling our secure automated voice messaging system at (520) 629-4810. When leaving your message, please include: your name, last 4, phone number, email address, whether you plan to attend in-person or virtually.



Vietnam War Commemoration 2024 - SAVAHCS will be hosting a Vietnam Veteran Remembrance Day & PACT Act Resource Fair in the Rose Garden Courtyard on Friday, March 29, 2024, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to honor our Vietnam Veterans. March 29 is National Vietnam Veterans Day. The Vietnam War Commemoration recognizes and thanks Vietnam Veterans for their service and sacrifices. The date marks the point when the last U.S. troops left South Vietnam ending America's direct military involvement in 1973.



Women's History Month – Office of Women's Health is dedicating Women's History Month to honoring American Indian and Alaska Native women Veterans! Native Americans serve at a higher rate compared to any other demographic, and yet, they remain part of an underserved Veteran community. During Women's History Month, this culture change campaign aims to inspire pride in women Veterans for their own service and the service of their sister warriors.



National Professional Social Work Month – During March, VA proudly celebrates National Professional Social Work Month. This year's theme encompasses the heart of what social workers do -- **Social Work Breaks Barriers.** -- This theme is reflected in VA social worker's core mission to help Veterans, their families and caregivers thrive by working to resolve social, economic, environmental, and health-related challenges.

- **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 or contact our Volunteer On-Boarding Specialist, Kristina Blake, at (520) 629- 1822 or email Kristina.Blake@va.gov.

- **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 trainin 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 \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov)

- **Get your Flu and updated Covid 19 Vaccinations**

Veterans can get their flu shots and Covid 19 vaccinations at the SAVAHCS main campus in the Vaccine Clinic located in Building 80 Saguaro Clinic by walk-in or at a regularly scheduled appointment. Walk-ins at the Saguaro Clinic are available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Flu Shots and Covid 19 vaccinations are also available at the Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) by contacting your Primary Care Team.

- **Sierra Vista VET Center Update**

- Sierra Vista VET Center has onboarded a full-time counselor. The counselor will provide both virtual and in person services out of The Warrior Healing Center. The VET Center is also recruiting for a second full time position.

- The Sierra Vista VET Center has identified a new space at 4481 Campus Drive and is projected to open in August 2024.
- Veterans in Sierra Vista needing assistance from the VET Center can call (520) 882-0333.
- **Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Data Matching for Beneficiary Travel**

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is working to improve compliance with the U.S. Treasury requirement (31 C.F.R. § 208 – *Management of Federal Agency Disbursements*) that all payments be made by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). This requirement is in place because electronic payments are the safest, most secure, and convenient form of payment. Veterans who are unable to receive electronic payments may apply for a waiver from the United States Treasury using form 1201W (Request for Payment of Federal Benefits by Check) [FS Form 1201W.pdf \(godirect.gov\)](#).

If Veterans do not have a bank account, they can apply for one using the Veterans Benefits Banking Program. [Veterans Benefits Banking Program \(VBBP\) - Veterans Benefits Administration \(va.gov\)](#)

To improve the safety and security of BT payments to Veterans, a new process was implemented with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) which includes the following:

- Veterans receiving Beneficiary Travel (BT) by check from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) are compared to Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) records to see if they are receiving a benefit payment (Education, Compensation, etc.) electronically.
- If the match comes back positive, it means that the Veteran has banking information on file with VBA.
- VHA notifies impacted Veterans of the identification of electronic banking information.
- VA then converts the Veteran’s Beneficiary Travel payments from paper check to EFT based on bank account information that VBA uses for current benefit payments.

Approximately 400,000 matches were identified by matching Beneficiary Travel records against VBA benefit records. The project is moving forward in three phases:

1. The first group of Veterans who will have BT payments shift to EFT will be in **mid-January 2024** and will include approximately 150,000 Veterans.
2. The second group of Veterans who will have BT payments shift to EFT will be in **mid-February 2024** and will include approximately 250,000 Veterans.
3. Thereafter, regular monthly matches will occur with the volume estimated at 1,700 per month.

Veterans will receive a special mailer if VHA identified banking information from VBA. Veterans will be informed if they need to update banking information or if they have questions, they can contact the following for help.

- VA’s toll-free line for banking changes 1-[800-827-1000](#)
- VA’s online system for banking changes or sign in to [www.va.gov/change-direct-deposit](#)

Veterans who wish to speak to someone at their local VA regarding electronic payments should be directed to the local Agent Cashier or Finance Staff. For general information on Beneficiary Travel Veterans should contact the local Beneficiary Travel Office or visit [www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/vtp](#).

- **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

Community Engagements & Partnerships

- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 549 provided a generous monetary donation to our Patriot Pantry, which provides emergency food assistance to Tucson VA Veteran patients experiencing food insecurity. Thank you [VFW Post 549](#) for supporting our Veterans – February 6
- Members of Immanuel Lutheran Church from Sierra Vista made a generous donation of handmade goods. The quilts, crocheted blankets, beanies and Valentine's Day cards were given to Veteran inpatients here at the Tucson VA. Thank you Immanuel Lutheran Church for supporting our Veterans – February 8
- Local Tucson Marine Veteran Peter Bourret has been selected as a first-place winner in the 2023 National Veterans Creative Arts Competition, Writing Division. Veteran Bourret took first-place for his poem "Shifting Gears," Veteran Bourret will have a chance to attend the National Creative Arts Festival in May, which will be held in Denver, Colorado <https://www.va.gov/southern-arizona-health-care/stories/> - February 13
- Veteran Walter Ram was honored with a signed letter from the Secretary of the VA to commemorate his 100th Birthday! Veteran Ram still serves as a docent for the Pima Air & Space Museum. Thank you, Veteran Ram, for your service to our Nation – February 15
- In celebration of National Salute to Veteran Patients, volunteers at SAVAHCS put on a Smooches with Pooches event. We thank our volunteers who came with trained support dogs to share some puppy cheer in visits with our Veterans! If you are interested in learning about volunteer opportunities supporting Veterans, you can learn more at: <https://www.va.gov/sout.../work-with-us/volunteer-or-donate/> - February 15
- Daughters of the American Revolution visited SAVAHCS to donate their time passing out cards to honor the Veterans in our Community Living Center in celebration of National Salute to Veteran Patients – February 15
- A local Tucson church honored Veteran Myrtle Graves with a signed letter from the Secretary of the VA to commemorate and celebrate her 100th birthday! Thank you, Veteran Graves, for your service to our Nation – February 20
- The SAVAHCS Outreach team had a whirlwind weekend connecting with Veterans amidst the excitement of the Southwest's iconic western heritage. They shared a booth with the VET Center at the historic Tucson Rodeo. Sharing resources and information with Veterans and their families between thrilling rodeo events– February 24
- The Outreach team was in Lordsburg, New Mexico, for the first annual Lordsburg Veteran PACT Fair, providing in-depth support and guidance to attendees on the latest VA benefits and programs – February 24
- Local historian James Christopher brought his traveling museum to our facility. He's an Air Force Veteran who shares his collection of artifacts. Christopher has been collecting pieces for over 30 years. Black History Month was an opportunity to showcase Veteran-centric items like Buffalo Soldiers, Tuskegee Airmen, and other historical pieces. Thank you, Mr. Christopher, for sharing your beautiful historic collection with our staff and Veterans – February 27





SAVAHCS Updates and Accomplishments

The PACT Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances. This law helps us provide generations of Veterans and their survivors with the care and benefits they have earned and deserve.

- As of 2/28/24 we have screened over 47,800 Veterans for Toxic Exposure Screenings.

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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

- **Emergency Department Expansion:** The design is complete. Construction funding has been tentatively approved for FY24.
- Three FY23 Non-Recurring Maintenance (NRM) projects are in the process of being transferred to the Army Corps of Engineering – construct perimeter fence, renovate Community Living Center building 60 and repair the roofs of buildings 50, 60, 78, and 90.

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 you in VA care. [VA Priority Groups | Veterans Affairs](#)
- **Veterans 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.
- **The 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.
- **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](tel:1-800-273-8255) and [Press 1](#), chat online at [Chat \(veteranscrisisline.net\)](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net) and text 838255 to reach trained crisis responders.
- **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.
- **Veterans can still 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 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, 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.

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/>
- **A Matter of Balance Workshop-Evidence Based Program by SAVAHCS**
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
- 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
- Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) (formerly Voluntary Services) 520-629-1822
- 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) 1-800-827-1000VA 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

