



SAVAHCS Director's Report

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Director

November 2024

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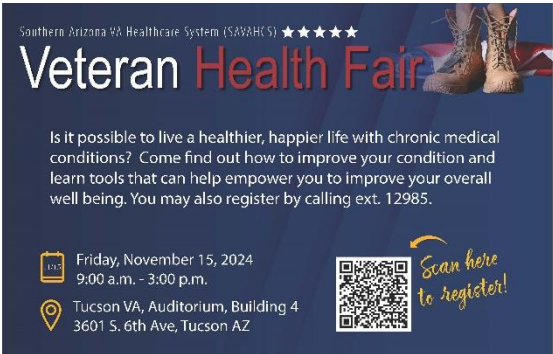
Hot Topics



Veterans Day Celebrations

Southern Arizona VA Health Care System Director Jennifer Gutowski and staff will participate in the Tucson Veterans Day Parade, showcasing a PACT Act-themed float. Other staff will attend the Sierra Vista and Safford Veterans Day parades. Our Center for Development & Civic Engagement will also be

hosting various events and activities for the Veterans on the main campus the week of Veterans Day. The VA honors all who have served.



Veteran Health Fair

Our Veterans Health Fair is on Friday, November 15, from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Tucson VA auditorium. The health fair aims to promote healthy living, education, and information about healthcare services available to Veterans. This opportunity connects Veterans with vital community resources,

including mental health services, housing assistance, and peer support networks. This empowers Veterans to lead healthier, more fulfilling lives.



Lung Cancer Awareness Day

SAVAHCS inspires Veterans to take charge of their well-being by participating at our Lung Cancer Awareness Day event. The Tucson VA Medical Center's Rose Garden will be filled with engaging and positive activities that enhance their well-being and community involvement. Join us on Friday, Nov. 15, from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. to learn about lung cancer screening, how to identify early-stage lung cancer, and tips for healthy lungs.

Prioritizing Patient Safety and Outcomes Through Facility Improvement

Pardon our dust as we renovate the emergency department! This project is not just about aesthetics; it's about improving patient outcomes. With modernized facilities, we will streamline processes and reduce wait times, allowing us to respond more effectively to emergencies. Your safety and well-being are our top priorities, and we appreciate your understanding as we work to create a better environment for all.

Get Your Flu Shot

Flu and COVID vaccinations are available at medical center or in one of our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC). You're encouraged to get yours today. The flu is a serious but preventable disease. Arizona's flu season lasts from October through April. A yearly flu shot is the best way to lower your chance of getting the flu. We want to make flu shots available in a way that is easy and safe for you.

When visiting the SAVAHCS for your flu shot, please remember not to come if you are feeling sick, exhibiting signs or symptoms of COVID-19, or have recently been in contact with someone who has a confirmed case of COVID-19. This precaution helps ensure the safety of all patients and staff. Additionally, we ask that you wear a shirt that allows easy access to your upper arm, close to your shoulder, to facilitate a smooth vaccination process. Your health and safety are our top priorities as we work to provide accessible flu vaccinations during the flu season.

You may get your flu shot during a scheduled appointment or at the times and locations below:

Flu Shots for main campus in Tucson:

- **Face-to-Face Flu Shots:**
 - Available during scheduled clinic appointments in primary care clinics, specialty clinics, and hemodialysis unit.
 - Walk-ins at the Immunization Clinic, Building 80 South

- Monday through Friday, (except for Federal Holidays)
- 7 a.m. through 4 p.m.

All Community Based Outpatient Clinics will be providing Flu vaccines during clinic appointments, can be scheduled by appointment, and will accommodate walk-ins during business hours.

Casa Grande CBOC (7 a.m. – 5 p.m.)
1876 E Sabin Drive #14, Bldg. A
Casa Grande, AZ 85122

Northwest Tucson CBOC (7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.)
3920 W Linda Vista Blvd
Tucson, Az 85742

Sierra Vista CBOC (6:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)
101N Coronado Dr. #A
Sierra Vista, AZ 85635

Safford CBOC (8 a.m. – 4 p.m.)
355 N 8th Ave
Safford, AZ 85546

Yuma CBOC (7 a.m. – 5 p.m.)
3111 S 4th Ave
Yuma, AZ 85364

SE CBOC (6:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)
7395 S Houghton Rd. #129
Tucson, AZ 85747

Green Valley CBOC (6:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)
380 West Vista Hermosa Drive. # 140
Green Valley, AZ 85614

Don't let the flu get the best of you! Protect yourself and your loved ones. Get your flu shot now.

My HealthVet on VA.gov Transition

The VA's patient portal, [My HealthVet](#), is moving to [VA.gov](#) one tool at a time. With the new **My HealthVet 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 Health eVet tool is completed, Veterans are testing it and sharing their feedback prior to the tool being moved permanently to the portal on [VA.gov](https://va.gov).

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.

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 Health Care available to Thousands of Southern Arizona 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 Veterans 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).

Whole Health Efforts 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.

Community Engagements & Partnerships



[Daughters of the American Revolution](#) Held their annual Cactus Kickoff. The DAR collected donations that filled a van and two truck beds full of supplies to be used at the Tucson Fisher House – October 2.



[Douglas Fall Veterans Resource Fair](#) Was held at the historic Gadsden Hotel in Douglas, Arizona and was the first stop on the new fiscal year outreach tour. The team provided valuable information and resources about VA health care to Veterans and their families – October 3.



[VFW Post 549](#) Made a monetary donation to the SAVAHCS Patriot Pantry. This donation provides for Veterans experiencing food insecurities – October 4.



5th Annual Native American Festival Was attended by the outreach team at Eastern Arizona College in Thatcher, Arizona. The team also attended Nogales Port MWR Family Day in Nogales, Arizona, providing information and resources to Veterans in rural areas – October 6.



Mental Health Summit Event provided resources and assistance with eligibility and enrollment, whole health, suicide prevention, women's health and disability claims for Veterans in attendance. Also honored was SAVAHCS Peer Support Specialist of the Year, Buzz Hickox – October 9.



Hope in the Park Was a success for SAVAHCS. Staff joined nearly 60 community service providers in supporting unsheltered Veterans and the homeless population. This event showcased the power of community collaboration in addressing homelessness. – October 11.



SAVAHCS Outreach Team Was at the Pinal County Stand Down in Coolidge, Arizona, and the Tucson Indian Center annual Native American Family Wellness Day event in Tucson. The team provided information and resources to Veterans and their families – October 12.



American Legion McCulloch-Wagner Post 109 Commander Roosevelt McKnight donated clothing items for the Homeless Clinic. The Tucson VA's Homeless Clinic assists Veterans experiencing housing insecurities and works with them to stabilize their living situation – October 15.



Home Based Primary Care Took Veterans for a relaxing time out of the house to Columbus Park. Festivities included a lunch as well as some fishing, singing and an overall relaxing day – October 16.



Cochise County Veteran Stand Down Hosted our outreach team along with 40 community providers assisted Veterans and their families with eligibility and enrollment, HUD VASH, suicide prevention, compensated work therapy, disability claims, and other community resources – October 18.



Pink Out Day Was celebrated by SAVAHCS staff to support Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Not only was this event a wonderful opportunity to wear pink and unite in the fight against breast cancer, but also share resources and answer any questions – October 18.



AARP Veteran Fraud Watch Hosted members of the outreach team. Guest speaker Paul Greenwood, Elder Abuse Consultant, shared valuable information regarding fraud detection and prevention. – October 19.



Footsteps for Healing Walk Included members of the outreach team on their community awareness walk dedicated to building safety and unity for survivors and families impacted by all forms of violence – October 19.



Healthcare Quality Week Was celebrated by members of the Infection Prevention and Healthcare Quality Teams. They gave educational and interactive presentations, as well as provided information on improvement initiatives at the Tucson VA – October 25.



Gila Valley Veteran Services Resource Fair Was enjoyed by our outreach team. Their attendance provided resources on whole health, suicide prevention, HUD-VASH, eligibility, and identification card renewal – October 25.

SAVAHCS Updates and Accomplishments

Southwestern Blind Rehabilitation Center celebrated its 30th Anniversary

What a milestone for the Southwestern Blind Rehabilitation Center (SWBRC). Thirty years of services is truly remarkable!

Leadership, staff and Veterans recognized this significant milestone Oct. 25. The first Veteran received training in the fall of 1994. The center offers training in low vision, manual skills, living skills, orientation & mobility, and accessible technology.

SWBRC has built its reputation on a unique, Veteran-integrated approach that places everyone at the center of their care. This model, pioneered by the center's first Chief, Joe Hennessey, has ensured SWBRC's continued success and recognition over the past three decades.

As the center celebrates our accomplishments during our first 30 years, it is with great pride and a sense of overwhelming gratitude that we thank our blind and visually impaired Veterans, our former and current staff members, community and Veteran service organizations and volunteers. [Read more.](#)

SAVAHCS' Community Living Center Receives Zero Findings

Veterans and leadership joined the Community Living Center staff to celebrate receiving zero clinical and zero life safety findings following a recent survey by Ascellon Corporation.

The survey program aims to identify potential risks, implement corrective actions, and improve the quality of care provided in these facilities. It also serves as a platform for sharing best practices and fostering a culture of excellence. [Read more.](#)

Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association 2024 Quality Awards

The AzHHA announced the winners of the 2024 Quality Awards as part of the 2024 Arizona Hospital Leadership Conference in Tucson.

The Maternal Health Innovation Award, which honors healthcare facilities for their outstanding efforts in enhancing maternal health outcomes. Top federal hospital: Southern Arizona VA Health Care System for their submission titled “Commitment to High Reliability: An Organizational Approach to Improving Care for our Women Veterans.”

“All of our award winners showcase the tremendous work that is happening in communities across our state to improve healthcare for all Arizonans,” said Ann-Marie Alameddin, AzHHA president and CEO.

SAVAHCS Construction Updates

Mental Health Building 90 expansion project to expand existing Mental Health Facility: Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) Mental Health Clinic construction phase scheduled to be completed by mid-December for the start of equipment installation. Furniture installs projected for mid to late-January 2025.

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 with the Agave Clinic followed by the Mental Health Primary Care Staff space. Agave Clinic staff will move to the PRRC Mental Health Clinic early-February 2025.

Auditorium Stage Renovations A new door is currently being built. Flooring and door will be installed in the fall. Projected end date of March 2025.

Roof Repair Projects Building 50, 78 and 90 have been completed. Building 60 E3 roof tile started on October 28.

Detour on East side of Army Run will remain in place for the next two weeks. All roofs anticipated to be complete by late December.

Emergency Department Expansion The project is scheduled to start this fall.

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

Cleland-Dole: Mental Health Copay Exemption

Veterans who owe [copays](#) for outpatient mental health and substance use disorder visits now have easier access to the soonest and best care. 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. [Learn more](#).

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 October 29, we have screened over 54,300 Veterans for Toxic Exposure Screenings.

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 COMPACT Act Coordinator Office at (520) 203-2191.

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 and Press 1, chat online at Chat (www.veteranscrisisline.net) and text 838255 to reach trained crisis responders.

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 the Virtual Health Resource Center (VHRC) at (520) 629-1713, email TucsonVHRC@va.gov or visit the center at the main facility in Bldg. 80 on the second floor. Hours are 8 a.m. to 4 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 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 mobile.va.gov. Veterans may also order prescriptions via phone at (800) 470-8262 (press 1).

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.

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>.

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, extension, 1-4051 for more information.

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 HealtheVet 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

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