



**November 2023  
SAVAHCS Director's Report**

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Director

**Hot Topics**



- Veterans Day 2023** – VA is proud to lead the nation in observing Veterans Day on November 11, 2023. All Veterans sacrifice to serve our nation – physically, emotionally, or by being away from loved ones. We must continue to put Veterans first, honoring their service and maintaining a vision for Veterans of the future. To all our nation’s Veterans – Thank You for your service!



- Million Veteran Program (MVP)** - Our MVP Team have enrolled over 18,000 Veterans into the Million Veteran Program. If you are a Vietnam Veteran, joining the Million Veteran Program could help other Veterans who served with you. Through the Million Veteran Program, researchers are studying how military experiences and exposures affect Veteran health. All Veterans can learn more and join today at [www.mvp.va.gov](http://www.mvp.va.gov).



- Southern Arizona VA Health Care System's Caregiver Support Group** -is hosting a resource fair on Wednesday, November 8th from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the auditorium of Building 4 at the Tucson VA. Information from Alzheimer’s Association, Tucson Vet Center, American Red Cross, SAVAHCS Whole Health team, Pima Council on Aging, TMC for Seniors and much more will be available! Please register at [VA Caregiver Resource Fair Tickets, Wed, Nov 8, 2023 at 11:00 AM | Eventbrite](#)



- 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.



- **What is a PACT Team** - A PACT or Patient Aligned Care Team is how we ensure that every Veteran receives comprehensive and complete care. It's team of providers, nurses and staff that are focused on you, the Veteran.

Find out more in this short video:

<https://youtu.be/ZgAd0iw57SA>

- **November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month**

Lung Cancer screenings save lives. Join us for the Lung Cancer Screening Program Event on Wednesday, November 8, 2023, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Rose Garden Courtyard at the Tucson VA Hospital. Lung cancer is the deadliest cancer among Veterans, but catching it early means a much higher rate of treatment success. If you're 50-80 years old, and if you formerly or currently smoke cigarettes, talk to your provider if lung cancer screening is right for you. Learn more about who can be screened and how.

[www.prevention.va.gov/preventing\\_diseases/screening\\_for\\_lung\\_cancer.asp](http://www.prevention.va.gov/preventing_diseases/screening_for_lung_cancer.asp)

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

It is time for Veterans to 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.

- **The Veterans Health Care Administration (VHA) issued the following guidance on face coverings on May 30, 2023.**

The masking guidance is in line with the latest CDC guidance.

- **Masking continues to be required for staff Veterans, and visitors while in high-risk areas listed below:**

- Dialysis
- Chemotherapy units
- ED
- SCI and CLC (staff and visitors only)

- **Masking is no longer universally required in the following locations:**

- Acute inpatient medical/surgical units
- Acute inpatient mental health units
- Intensive care units with closed rooms
- Congregate settings and bedded residential settings (e.g., blind rehab, residential mental health, homeless shelters)
- Outpatient areas where there is not a significant proportion of patients who are high-risk for complication.

- **SAVAHCS received accreditation after the following health care inspections:**

- Southwest Blind Rehab recently received their 3-year re-accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).
- On July 19, 2023, the SAVAHCS received the accreditation award letters from the Joint Commission for the hospital's Behavioral Health Care and Human Services, and Home Care Comprehensive Accreditation Programs.
- On September 28, 2023, the SAVAHCS Community Living Center Rehabilitation and Amputee Specialty Care Programs received their 3-year accreditation award letters from the CARF.

## Community Engagements & Partnerships

- SAVAHCS celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with an exciting performance by Ballet Folklorico Los Tucsonenses. VA employees, Veterans and their families were dazzled by the beautiful array of colors and smiles and the entertaining traditional dance and dress – October 3
- SAVAHCS Outreach Team and Leadership attended the Douglas Veteran Resource Fair hosted by Fred Hilburn Post 11 American Legion in Douglas, AZ. Veterans and family members in attendance received information and services from Enrollment and Eligibility, Women’s Health Clinic, and Suicide Prevention – October 10
- Dr. Shereef Elnahal, Under Secretary of Health for the Department of Veterans Affairs, met with local Veterans and SAVAHCS staff. He listened to Veterans share their health care experiences at SAVAHCS. He ended his visit with a Town Hall to discuss with staff current VA initiatives and strategies aimed at providing Veterans high quality health care. He also answered staff questions regarding hiring practices, and consistent policy practices throughout VHA system. Dr. Steven Braverman, VISN 22 Interim Network Director also participated in the visit. – October 13
- SAVAHCS staff and Veterans sported pink in support of National Pink Out Day, which aims to raise awareness for breast cancer. Together we can send a powerful message, and save lives – October 13
- SAVAHCS Outreach Team attended the Pinal County Veterans Stand Down in Casa Grande. Veterans and family members in attendance received information and services from Enrollment and Eligibility, Women’s Health Clinic, Suicide Prevention, Environmental Registry, and Homeless Program – October 14
- SAVAHCS Polytrauma/TBI Team participated in the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona Community Event at Brandi Fenton Memorial Park – October 14
- SAVAHCS Outreach Team attended the Annual Rockin 4 Heroes Event which honors First Responders, Active Military, Veterans, and Gold Stars. Veterans and family members in attendance received information and services from Enrollment and Eligibility, Environmental Registry and Suicide Prevention – October 15
- SAVAHCS Persons With Disabilities Special Emphasis Program hosted a table at the Tucson campus to raise awareness for Disability Mentoring Day, which is a nationwide effort to promote career development for Veterans with disabilities through hands-on career exploration – October 19
- VA Be Connected Community Mental Health Summit. The purpose of the Summit is to bring together key stakeholders in the community with the goal of enhancing access to mental health services and addressing the mental health care needs of Veterans and their family members residing in Southern Arizona – October 19
- CEO/Tribal Liaison Tonya Hamilton with the Governor’s Office of Youth, Faith and Family met with the Director and SAVAHCS Staff to discuss SAVAHCS volunteer services, community engagement, chaplain services, as well as health care services and outreach for the Native American Veteran population. Ms. Hamilton also received a windshield tour of Tucson Main Campus and the Fisher House – October 23
- SAVAHCS held our Quarterly Congressional, VSO, and Stakeholder meeting to provide hot topic items pertaining to our Veteran population, updates, and accomplishments – October 24
- SAVAHCS celebrated our 95th Anniversary. The theme was the Roaring 20’s. The era when ground was broken on what would become the heart of SAVAHCS. Veterans, Staff, and Family members enjoyed performances by the Catalina Foothills High School Jazz Band and a talent show from our SAVAHCS Staff – October 27
- SAVAHCS Fisher House celebrated an open house sponsored by Charities Helping American Military Patriots. CHAMP and the Sons of the American Legion Riders of Arizona presented awards to the outgoing Fisher House Director Kelly Laurich in appreciation for her eight years of dedicated service to Veteran families – October 28
- SAVAHCS Outreach Team attended the 35th Annual NAM Jam Event which honors the Vietnam Veterans returning home. Veterans and family members in attendance received information and services from Enrollment and Eligibility, Women’s Health Clinic, Military 2 VA, Tucson VET Center, and Suicide Prevention – October 28









## SAVAHCS Updates and Accomplishments

- **PACT Act:**
  - As of 11/2/23 we have screened 43,541 Veterans for Toxic Exposure Screenings, and 21,365 Veterans requested follow ups.

- **Tucson VA Leads in Quality and Healthcare Advancement**

Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association (AzHHA) recognizes Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) as a 2023 Quality Award recipient.

Winners were announced during the AzHHA's Inaugural Quality Awards Luncheon held Oct. 25. These awards were created to recognize Arizona's leaders who are committed to advancing healthcare through exceptional quality performance, community engagement and a culture of continuous improvement.

*"The quality of submissions and winners reflect the tremendous work that is happening in our communities across the state," said Ann-Marie Alameddin, president, and CEO of AzHHA. "Congratulations to our award winners who are working every day to pursue excellence in quality and patient safety."*

**Tucson VA received the following three 2023 AzHHA Quality Awards:**

- The Community Engagement Award highlighting a healthcare facilities' exceptional commitment to community involvement. Tucson VA's submission titled "Native American Advocacy" focused on their Native American Advocacy Project created to help bridge the historic distrust and apprehension of the local Native American community with the United States Government. Under this project, we increased the percentage of Native American patients with an advocate follow-up visit from 70% to 98%. In the long term, our project will help increase proactive patient interactions, self-care, treatment, recovery, and confidence in the healthcare system.
- The Emergency Management Innovation award for safeguarding the community, maintaining a high level of emergency response readiness, and fostering resilience in the face of unforeseen events. Tucson VA's COVID Operational Status Process' submission outlined their journey to develop an efficient process delivering discernable information to the Executive Leadership Team and those delegated to the management of healthcare operations for the facility. This more efficient process allows Tucson VA to mitigate the potential for fatal infection outcomes from COVID.
- The Top Overall Excellence award recognizing the highest achievement among the top winners from each category with their "COVID Operational Status Process," submission.

*"Beyond proud of our Tucson VA staff for receiving three AzHHA Quality Awards," said Jennifer Gutowski, SAVAHCS Medical Center Director/CEO. "This achievement showcases our commitment to delivering exceptional care and serving Veterans, families, and caregivers with purpose, passion, and pride. Thank you to all who contributed their hard work and dedication in making this possible."*

## 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):** Due to supply chain issues, the activation of the first phase has been delayed to November 2023. The second phase, which will convert existing administrative space into clinical space, is scheduled to be completed by April 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

- **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](https://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](https://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

