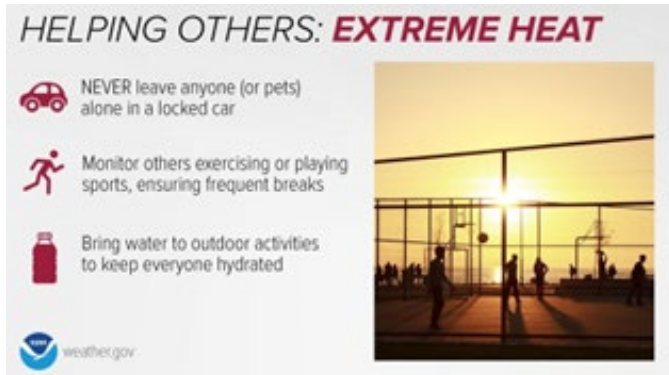




August 2023
SAVAHCS Director's Report
 Jennifer S. Gutowski, MHA, FACHE
 Director

Hot Topics



- **Extreme Heat across Southern Arizona**

All of southern Arizona continues to be gripped by a period of excessive heat.

Please exercise caution when considering outdoor activities. For more information about the current weather:

<https://www.weather.gov/psr/Heat?TUS>



- **14th Annual Gathering of American Indian Veterans**

The Coalition for American Indian Veterans will host the 14th Annual Gathering of American Indian Veterans on Saturday, August 19, 2023 at the Desert Diamond Casino located on 7350 S. Nogales Hwy, Tucson, AZ 85756

- **Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) will participate in the Cochise County Stand Down**
 Cochise Serving Veterans is hosting the Cochise County Stand Down on Friday, August 18, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Cochise Serving Veterans is a 501(c)(3) organization supporting all of Cochise County. Through collaborative efforts, they aid Veterans and their families in addressing challenges through outreach, education, and networking. Their goal is to enable Veterans to achieve and/ or maintain independence and self-sufficiency through a focused source of Veteran resources, referral services and community support.
- **PACT Act Deadlines**
 - If you apply for PACT Act-related benefits on or before August 9, 2023, your benefits may be backdated to August 10, 2022 – so get your claims in as soon as possible. And if you're not ready to submit a full claim by then, don't worry – you can also submit an intent to file before August 10, 2023, and still receive the same effective date.
 - Also, there are only two months remaining in the PACT Act one-year special health care enrollment period for Post-9/11 combat Veterans. VA encourages all Post 9-11 combat Veterans to apply now before this eligibility window closes on September 30. To learn more, visit VA.gov/PACT.
- **CMS Overall Hospital Star Ratings**
 The CMS Star Rating national press release has been published [Majority of VA health care facilities receive 4 or 5 stars in CMS quality ratings, outperforming non-VA facilities.](#)

[Find Healthcare Providers: Compare Care Near You Medicare](#)

- **VA police begin to use body cams and dash cams:**
In accordance with new Federal Laws, on June 30th VA Police Officers, within the VA Desert Pacific Network (VISN 22), began using body-worn and in-car cameras. Careful considerations were taken to ensure your privacy. No video will be recorded in locations where a reasonable expectation of personal privacy exists. Cameras will be activated by the officer anytime they respond to a call or have contact with a person for law enforcement purposes including anytime the emergency lights on their vehicle are activated. To Learn more visit VA News: <https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-police-begin-to-use-body-cams-and-dash-cams/>.
- **VA waives copayments for eligible Native American/Alaskan Native Veterans.** On April 3, 2023, the VA announced all eligible American Indian and Alaskan Native Veterans are no longer required to make copayments for health care and urgent care received through VA. Also, under the new policy VA will reimburse copayments made on/ or after January 5, 2022, for more information, visit <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5870>.
- **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 & urgent care
 - Open Bay Medical ICUs
 - 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
 - Clinical areas where aerosol generating procedures are performed
 - Laboratories collecting or handling specimens from known or suspected COVID-19 patients (e.g., areas where staff are manipulating cultures from known or suspected COVID-19 patients)
 - 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
- **The following health care inspections of the SAVAHCS received their accreditations:**
 - 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.

Community Engagements & Partnerships

- A special thank you to Graybar and their staff for the amazing donation, hard work and long hours spent organizing the annual golf tournament in support of Southern Arizona VA Health Care System Fisher House - July 7
- SAVAHCS presented the DAISY and BEE awards to nurses who demonstrate exceptional compassionate patient care for our Veterans - July 10
- Senator Mark Kelly's staff met with Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) leadership and Yuma VA staff at the Yuma VA Clinic. Topics of discussion included current and future projects to improve Veteran health care delivery in Yuma. The SAVAHCS appreciates the visit and support for our Veterans - July 13
- The SAVAHCS wrapped up an incredible hiring fair. It was wonderful connecting with so many talented individuals, and we're thrilled to welcome 279 new team members in joining the mission to serve our Veterans at the SAVAHCS. Thank you to everyone who attended - July 15
- The Tucson VA hosted a PACT Act VET Fest Event along with the Veterans Benefits Administration. There was an unprecedented turn out of Veterans and their families who received information and assistance - July 22

- The SAVAHCS Persons with Disabilities Special Emphasis Program Managers, hosted a table in the lobby of building 80. They distributed information on the Americans with Disabilities Act, and conducted fun activities for our staff and Veterans - July 26



Recurring Community Outreach Events Each Month

- Sierra Vista United Veterans Council Meeting - First Saturday of each month
- Unified Arizona Veterans (UAV) Monthly Membership Meeting - First Saturday of each month
(Goes dark July, August)
- City of Tucson Veterans Affairs Committee Meeting - Second Wednesday of each month
(Goes dark June, July, August)
- Yuma Military Affairs Committee (MAC) Meeting - Last Wednesday of each month

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 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 PACT Act-** The PACT Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. The new law empowers VA to provide generations of Veterans and their survivors with the care and benefits they have earned. Key components of the PACT Act can be located at the following www.va.gov/PACT The PACT Act will bring these changes:
 - Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras
 - Adds 20+ more presumptive conditions for burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic exposures
 - Adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation
 - Requires VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care
 - Helps us improve research, staff education, and treatment related to toxic exposures
 - If you're a Veteran or survivor, you can file claims now to apply for PACT Act-related benefits by either visiting <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/> or calling 1-800-698-2411 for more information.
- **COMPACT Act of 2020-** Starting January 17, 2023, Veterans in acute suicidal crisis will be able to go to any VA or non-VA health care facility for emergency health care at no cost – including inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days and outpatient care for up to 90 days. Veterans do not need to be enrolled in the VA system to use this benefit, for more information click [HERE](#).
- **The SERVICE Act-** Was signed into law in August 2022, 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-** Please have Veterans who have questions on how to use the virtual technology options 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 MyHealtheVet** for all their routine healthcare needs. Veterans can make medical appointments, contact providers, and request prescription refills. To learn more, contact the SAVAHCS MyHealtheVet 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 HealtheVet 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 connect with a registered nurse for any routine health care questions or concerns over the phone.

DID YOU KNOW?

- **Veterans can see how VA Hospitals rank on patient satisfaction in comparison to community hospitals through Medicare's Care Compare Website.** On the Care Compare website, you can search and compare VA and non-VA medical care facilities. To view the Care Compare website, click [HERE](#).
- **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

