



January 2024
SAVAHCS Director's Report
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Director

Hot Topics



- **Happy New Year!** – As we bid farewell to 2023, let us look forward to the year ahead, one which will bring us new opportunities for improvement in the care and service we provide to our Veterans and kindness to one another and ourselves. We thank you for your continued support and partnership. Here's to 2024!



- **The *MOVE!* Program** – SAVAHCS *MOVE!* Program is here to support you. *MOVE!* Is the VA's weight management program with a focus on overall health. Find out what works for you and meet your healthy living goals.

Start with the *MOVE!* Orientation Class. This introductory class will review the program concepts, goals, and resources. Ask your Primary Care clinic to schedule or place an order for scheduling. Orientation classes are available virtually and in person. For more information contact the *MOVE!* Program at (520) 629-4659 or Secure Message: TUC *MOVE!* PROGRAM. Learn more about *MOVE!* on the website: www.move.va.gov

12-08-22 | PLUGGED IN
The VA is turning to VR to help vets manage chronic pain

Caregivers at 18 Veterans Affairs facilities will write patients a "prescription" for an FDA-authorized eight-week VR program called RelieVRx.



SAVAHCS Was Selected to be One of These 18 Pilot Sites

- **VR program RelieVRx** – SAVAHCS was selected among 18 VA facilities nationwide for a pilot program to test an FDA-authorized eight-week virtual reality (VR) program called RelieVRx to help Veterans manage chronic pain. SAVAHCS was number 1 in the nation enrolling Veterans in this pilot program. Ninety-eight Veterans enrolled in the Geriatric Extended Care service and the Women's Health program have benefitted from this program. Veterans and providers have provided positive feedback about the program.



- **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.



VA Health Chat – The VA Health Chat app provides easy, online access to chat with VA staff when you have questions about medications or need to refill a prescription. Only patients receiving care within SAVAHCS are eligible to use VA Health Chat.

VA Pharmacy staff members are available to chat Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., excluding federal holidays.

Access the website or download the app here:

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-chat>

- **SAVAHCS MLK Remembrance Walk**

Please save the date for SAVAHCS Remembrance Walk to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The walk will be held on Thursday, January 11, 2024, and begins at 11:00 a.m. by Building 50 flagpole and finishes outside Building 4. For more information contact Rhonda Murray at (520) 792-1450 extension 1-3982.

- **SAVAHCS Women Veterans Tele-Town Hall**

Please save the date for SAVAHCS Women Veterans Tele-Town Hall which will be held on Thursday, January 25, 2024, from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. For more information contact Gina Wan by email at Gina.Wan@va.gov or call (520) 792-1450 extension 1-5498.

- **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.

- **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](#)

- **Sierra Vista VET Center Update**

- The VET Center continues to provide support virtually to Veterans in Sierra Vista. In addition, an in-person Vietnam Veteran group meets every other week, supported by staff from Tucson.
- Sierra Vista VET Center is currently onboarding 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](tel: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

- **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 **three** accreditation award letters from the Joint Commission for the Hospital, 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.
 - On October 3, 2023, the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) Board of Commissioners granted a 5-year accreditation to the Employee-Based Entry to Practice Nurse Residency Program at Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System.

Community Engagements & Partnerships

- SAVAHCS had the grand opening of our Virtual Health Resource Center. The VHRC is located at the SAVAHCS main campus in building 80, 2nd floor and where Veterans, Veterans' family members and their caregivers can receive in-person support with virtual care technologies and learn which virtual care options are right for their health and lifestyle needs. VHRC Services are available via walk-in or by scheduled appointment. Veterans interested in scheduling an appointment can contact TucsonVHRC@va.gov – December 1
- SAVAHCS Outreach Team was proud to attend the Arizona National Guard Muster. The Muster celebrates the rich history and traditions of the Arizona National Guard. It was a great opportunity to learn more about the Guard's role in our community and to connect with the men and women who serve our state – December 3
- The Catalinas Women's Club donated over 200 decorative, hand-made boxes with chocolates inside. These will spread the holiday cheer to our Veterans and their families in the Community Living Center, Fisher House, and the Hematology-Oncology unit at our medical center. Thank you, Friendly Village of the Catalinas Women's Club, for the thoughtful and generous donation – December 5
- SAVAHCS celebrated Diversity Day and our diverse culture. Diversity Day is a day to celebrate and embrace who we are despite our differences, no matter what race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, nationality, or disability. SAVAHCS's many diversity programs attended to share resources and information with Veterans, staff and hospital community members – December 6
- VFW Post 2066 from Nogales Arizona donated stocking stuffers for our Veterans here at SAVAHCS. Thank you VFW Post 2066 for spreading the holiday cheer – December 7
- The Marana Veterans Club made a generous donation to SAVAHCS Fisher House. Donations like this help make the Fisher House a home away from home for families of Veterans receiving care at the Tucson VA. Thank you Marana Veterans Club for supporting Veterans and their families – December 7
- The Atmosphere Commercial Interiors Group made a heartwarming donation to the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans program at SAVAHCS. They generously provided stockings filled with toiletries and other essential items, which will be distributed to Veterans experiencing homelessness. Thank you, Atmosphere Commercial Interiors Group, for your compassion and generosity – December 8
- SAVAHCS Enrollment & Eligibility team partnered with the Tucson and Mesa Vet Centers and the Arizona Department of Veterans Services at the Solera at Johnson Ranch Veterans Outreach Event in San Tan Valley, Arizona – December 8
- SAVAHCS celebrated the centennial birthday of Harvey Horn, a former POW/MIA Veteran. Harvey still volunteers at the Tucson VA Hospital on Wednesdays serving his fellow Veterans and VA staff – December 13
- The American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Arizona donated bags filled with toiletries and clothing items. These bags will be given to Veterans who are assisted by the SAVAHCS Homeless Program. Thank you, American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Arizona for spreading the holiday cheer to our Veterans – December 18

- The Knights of Columbus Council 13272 donated almost 200 gift bags with new socks. Veterans who are undergoing treatment at SAVAHCS will have warm and cozy feet. Thank you, Knights of Columbus Council 13272, for your generosity – December 18
- SAVAHCS celebrated the centennial birthday of Walter Ram, a former POW Veteran. Walter volunteers at the Pima Air and Space Museum and loves to talk about the B-17 Superfortress that he served on during WWII. Happy 100th Birthday Walter – December 19
- The dancers from Maguire Academy of Irish Dance visited SAVAHCS on Christmas Eve to perform for our Veterans in the Community Living Center. Their heartfelt performance brought joy and festive cheer, leaving gratitude and warmth in the hearts of residents and staff – December 24





SAVAHCS Updates and Accomplishments

- **PACT Act:**
 - As of 1/2/24 we have screened over 45,000 Veterans for Toxic Exposure Screenings.
- **In 2023, we have many things to celebrate and be proud of as an organization:**
 - We celebrated 95 years of providing exceptional health care and services to our Veterans, their families, and survivors!
 - We had the privilege to visit with VA Secretary, Denis McDonough and the Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal and highlight the outstanding work done by our staff.
 - We implemented new and innovative programs and opened a Long COVID clinic and a new Virtual Health Resource Center.
 - We graduated the first students in the Dietetic Internship Program.
 - We expanded our Whole Health programming to both Veterans and our employees.
 - We on-boarded over 100 staff in our Mental Health department for FY23.
 - We maintained a Veteran Trust score of > 90%.
 - Every three years, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) conducts a comprehensive assessment of its medical facilities' complexity through the VHA complexity model, and the most current release has placed SAVAHCS as a 1A Facility - the most complex. VHA Complexity Model is a method to classify VA medical facilities based on the complexity of their clinical services, patient population, education and research missions, and administrative factors.

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 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 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

