



July 2023
SAVAHCS Director's Report
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Director

Hot Topics



- **Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) Hiring Fair:**
The SAVAHC's will hold a Hiring Fair on Saturday, July 15th from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm at the Tucson VA Medical Center located at 3601 S 6th Avenue, Bldg. 80 Tucson, AZ 85723.

All VA employment candidates must check-in at the building 80 entrance at the Tucson VA Medical Center. Attendees of the Hiring Fair must enter through the Ajo Gate and park in parking lots F and Q.



- **Tucson VA to host a Summer VetFest PACT Act Outreach Event:**
The SAVAHC's will host a Summer VetFest PACT Act Claims Clinic and Veteran Resource Fair on Saturday, July 22 from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at the Tucson VA Medical Center located at 3601 S 6th Avenue Tucson, AZ 85723.

The Summer VetFest PACT Act Claims Clinic will be held in the Tucson VA Auditorium located in Building 4. We ask that all Veterans enter through the Ajo entrance and park in parking lot Q located on the northwest side of building 4.

At the clinic, VA staff will help Veterans apply for benefits, complete toxic exposure screenings, and enroll in VA Health Care. Veterans and their families can also learn about some of the healthcare resources offered through VA during the event. All Veterans are invited to the PACT Act Claims Clinic to learn more about what VA offers and how to access VA resources.

The PACT Act is the largest expansion of Veteran health care and benefits in decades. To learn more about the PACT Act visit <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>. Light refreshments will be provided while supplies last.

The SAVAHCS has spent the better part of the past few months implementing provisions of the PACT Act. As of June 23, 2023, The SAVAHCS has completed over 33,444 Toxic Exposure Screenings and has followed up with over 15,716 Veterans.

- **First Amendment Audit and Filming in Public Areas:**

A First Amendment audit is conducted by one or two people who intend to record their interactions with government officials to ensure that the First Amendment right to record in public is preserved. The SAVAHCS is committed to ensuring that all protected health information and personally identifiable information is safeguarded at all times. If you are confronted by someone filming, notify the VA Police at the VA non-emergency number 1-1823, so the VA police can observe and document. In case of emergencies dial 222.

- **VA police began 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, 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)

Community Engagements & Partnerships

- SAVAHCS staff participated in the 2023 Yuma Veteran Stand Down at the Yuma County Library Main Branch. The stand down connected Yuma Veterans with VA and community resources. Our staff had a great time serving Yuma Veterans during the stand down- May 27.
- We remember our fallen Veterans who gave all to the United States. Take a moment today to be thankful for those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. We at Southern Arizona VA Health Care System give honor to our nation's fallen heroes- May 29.
- The Women of Quail Creek from Green Valley donated to the VA's HUD-VASH and Homeless programs. They donated items for the kitchen and shoes for Veterans experiencing challenges with housing. A warm thank you to the Women of Quail Creek for this generous donation- June 6.
- The Veterans Club of Sun City Oro Valley donated to the Patriot Pantry. Their generous donation included food, beverages, and a monetary donation. These items will support Veterans and their families who are experiencing food insecurities. A big thank you to the Veterans Club of Sun City Oro Valley- June 8.
- The SAVAHCS Director delivered remarks at this year's Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Conference held in Phoenix Arizona June- 8.
- The DAV Auxiliary Cactus Unit 2 helped celebrate Flag Day. The DAV Auxiliary handed out U.S. Flags to Veterans coming to the VA. Thank you DAV Auxiliary Cactus Unit 2 for honoring our Veterans and celebrating Flag Day with us- June 14.
- The Tucson VA African American Special Emphasis Program held a Juneteenth celebration, which included Juneteenth-inspired poems and a traditional African drum and dance- June 14.
- The Secretary of the VA, Dennis McDonough visited the Yuma VA Community Clinic located in Yuma, Arizona. He presented Secretary of the VA Coins to select Yuma VA staff and met with Southern Arizona VA Health Care System leadership to discuss the expansion of Veteran benefits under the PACT Act. Thank you, Honorable Denis McDonough, for taking the time to visit our Yuma VA Community Clinic- June 14.
- The Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) hosted a Women's Health Focus Group. This event was virtual hosted on Microsoft Teams- June 22.
- The SAVAHCS Director delivered remarks at this year's American Legion Conference held in Tucson Arizona. Southern Arizona VA Staff were also in attendance to provide Veterans and their families with Suicide Prevention, Eligibility an Enrollment, Mental Health, PACT Act and others important resources- June 22.
- We want to extend our gratitude to Ann Hodgkiss, who donated a collection of her paintings and accompanying easels to adorn the bedside tables in the Community Living Center. Made in loving memory of Air Force Veteran Steve Dorgan, her brother, who received hospice care with our team, she says the donations were just a way she wanted to pay it forward in appreciation of the care her brother received last year- June 20.
- Staff from Vantage West Credit Union dropped off three huge boxes of socks at the Tucson VA. The 400+ pairs of socks will be given to Veterans treated in the Podiatry Clinic. Thank you, Vantage West Credit Union, our Veterans appreciate your generosity- June 23.
- A big shout out to the Arizona Transportation Builder's (ATB) Association for their massive donation of goods to the Patriot Pantry. This will help our Veterans with food insecurities in the area. Thank you, ATB, for generously supporting our Veterans- June 23.
- Northern Arizona VA Health Care System, Phoenix VA Health Care System & Southern Arizona VA Health Care System hosted their annual AZ Statewide Virtual PTSD Summit. Veterans learned about resources to help and cope with PTSD. The Virtual Summit included breakout sessions on special topics- June 27.





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
- **Bed Tower #1 will be solicited for construction in the third quarter of FY23:** Radiology has resubmitted an MRI and CT lease package to Contracting
- **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 has been completed. 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 be 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:** As of January 17, 2023, Veterans in acute suicidal crisis are 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/>

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

