



June 2023 SAVAHCS Director's Report

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Director

Hot Topics

- **Beneficiary Travel Over 30 Day Filing Claim Rule will expire on June 9, 2023.** Starting Friday, June 9, 2023, the 30-day timely filing for Beneficiary Travel claims rule will resume for all travel claims as prescribed in 28 CFR Part 70, VHA Beneficiary Travel Under 38 U.S.C. 111. The congressional COVID Pandemic Emergency, which has allowed Beneficiary Travel to evaluate and pay travel claims for more than 30 days, **is set to expire on Friday, June 9, 2023.** Any travel claims filed 30 days after an appointment will be denied. **All Veterans have until Thursday, June 8, 2023,** to file any outstanding travel claims for appointments more than 30 days past the filing date since March 20, 2020. For more information, please reach out to SAVAHCS Beneficiary Travel Office at 520-629-4713.
- **The PACT Act created new windows of VA health care eligibility for Post-9/11 combat Veterans.** The first window of eligibility—a one-year special enrollment period that began on October 1, 2022—now only has a few months remaining, visit www.va.gov/PACT to learn more.
- The SAVAHCS has spent the better part of the past few months implementing provisions of the PACT Act. As of May 23, 2023, The SAVAHCS has completed over 30,649 Toxic Exposure Screenings and has followed up with over 14,644 Veterans.
- **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 took place during the month of May:**
 - The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) virtual visit of the SWBRC - May 8-10
 - VISN 22 Survey Visit to review Quality Program Operations, Patient Safety, Controlled Substances, Clinical Risk Management, and Utilization Management - May 22-26
 - Program review for the Geriatrics and Extended Care Home (GEC) Rehabilitation Programs and Quality/Patient Safety - Wednesday, May 24

Community Engagements & Partnerships

- Veterans that participated in the 2023 National Creative Arts Festival showcased some of their artwork and performed for Veteran patients in the Community Living Center (CLC) located at the Tucson VA Medical Center. All the Veteran performers and artists were presented with medals that they won at the National Creative Arts Festival by the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System Director - Wednesday, May 3
- FC Tucson Soccer Club front office staff stopped by the Tucson VA Medical Center and donated soccer tickets and other items for our Veteran patient programs - Monday, May 8
- As Part of Nurses Week 2023, which took place May 6-12, nurses at the Tucson VA Medical Center gathered for a Blessing of the Hands Ceremony and reading of the Florence Nightingale Pledge. The ceremony is meant to acknowledge that human touch is a part of the healing process for patients - Tuesday, May 9
- Staff and Veterans took part in the 2023 National VA2K Walk & Roll. The annual event helps Veteran homeless programs and promotes health and wellness with SAVAHCS staff and Veterans - Wednesday, May 17
- The SAVAHCS hosted executive leaders from health care facilities across the VA Pacific Health Care Network (VISN 22) at the Tucson VA Medical Center for the VISN 22 Executive Leadership Council - Tuesday through Wednesday, May 23-24, 2023
- City of Tucson Councilmember Ward 5 Richard Fimbres presented thank you cards created by elementary school for SAVAHCS Veterans- Friday, May 26
- Yuma 2023 Veterans Stand Down at the Yuma County Library Main Branch - Saturday, May 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
- We expect the renovation of our inpatient acute care unit, 2S, to be awarded at the end of May. We anticipate starting construction in August 2023
- 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-** 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 and Press 1](tel:1-800-273-8255), 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

