



January 2024
SAVAHCS Director's Report
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 Director

June 2024

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Hot Topics



- Office Pride! Decorate your office and show your pride during the month.
- June 4** SAVAHCs 4th Annual Pride Parade and Rainbow Day! Wear your best Pride and come join the parade. We will meet at the Rose Garden at 9:45 a.m. Parade starts at 10:00 a.m.
 - June 6** Visit us at our Resource and Outreach table in building 80 lobby.
 - June 14** Bisbee Arizona Pride - SAVAHCs will be hosting a booth at Bisbee Pride again this year. Come visit our booth and say HI!
 - June 27** Stop by the Rose Garden and visit our Resource and Outreach table.

LOVE • RESPECT • FREEDOM • DIVERSITY • EQUITY

SAVAHCs 4th Annual Pride Parade and Rainbow Day

SAVAHCs kicks off Pride Month with a parade and Rainbow Day on June 4. Throughout the month, SAVAHCs will also be hosting resource tables to provide information and support to LGBTQ+ employees and Veterans.



Juneteenth Lunch & Learn

On June 18, SAVAHCs African American Special Emphasis Program Manager will be hosting a gathering for staff, Veterans and their family members to learn more about Juneteenth.



SAVAHCS Quarterly Mental Health Open House

Please join us on Tuesday, June 25, from 10:00 a.m. to noon. The Open House provides a brief overview of most of our mental health services and more. The presentation will be in-person in Building 4 Auditorium and virtual through WebEx. Please RSVP by calling our secure automated voice messaging system at (520) 629-4810. When

leaving your message, please include: your name, last 4, phone number, email address, whether you plan to attend in-person or virtually.

Volunteers Needed

The Center for Development and Civic Engagement is recruiting volunteers for various positions throughout the facility. Come show your support for Veterans by volunteering in one of our many opportunities:

- Ambassador Patient Transportation (Help escort Veterans to their appointments)
- Van Drivers from Yuma or Casa Grande to our main campus in Tucson
- In-Home Visitor Program Volunteers/Compassionate Contact Corp
- Blind Rehab Recreation Activities Assistants
- Chaplain Office Assistant
- Concierge Information desk
- Comfort Cart Attendant (Bring comfort items to inpatients.)
- Van Drivers to provide local transportation for our Blind Rehab Veterans
- Emergency Department Assistant to charge nurse on duty (Open 24/7)
- HUD/VASH & Homeless Administrative Assistant
- Primary Care Patient Administrative Assistant (mailings)
- Yoga instructors (please inquire for specifics)

For more information, please email TucsonCDCE@va.gov or contact our Volunteer On-Boarding Specialist, Kristina Blake, at (520) 629- 1822 or email kristina.blake@va.gov.

VA Expanding Health Care Eligibility to Millions of Veterans

VA announced that all Veteran who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military, at home or abroad, will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care beginning March 5, 2024. This means that all Veteran who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11 will be eligible to enroll without first applying for VA benefits. Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while

training or on active duty in the United States will also be eligible to enroll. In one of the largest-ever expansions of Veteran health care (va.gov)

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

Whole Health

Whole Health is VA's approach to care that supports the Veteran's or individual's health and well-being. This means the health care team develops a personalized health plan based on the Veteran's values, needs, and goals., and what's important to them.

We offer self-help skills and support to make the changes the Veteran wants through: [Mindful Awareness](#), [Moving the Body](#), [Personal Development](#), [Nutrition](#), [Spirit & Soul](#), [Power of the Mind](#) and more.

We're actively spreading the word so that more Veterans are aware and enroll in these services.



[Patient Experience Fair](#) at the Tucson VA, where staff shared information about services that enhance the lives of Veterans and their family members.

[Click here to watch video](#) – May 1.



[Davis Monthan Air Force Base Exchange Grand Reopening](#) was attended by our SAVAHCS Outreach Team.

The team provided information and resources on Suicide Prevention and Eligibility and Enrollment to Veterans and their family members – May 3.



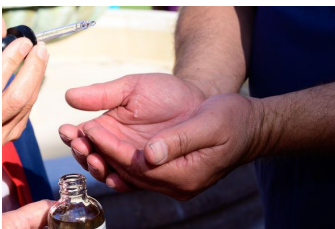
[The Sunflower Community Program](#) made a generous food

donation to our Patriot Pantry. Keeping our Patriot Pantry stocked allows us to continue to support Veterans who may be experiencing food insecurities – May 3.



[SAVAHCS Caregiver Support Program](#) hosted a caregiver

support summit for community partners. The focus of the summit was to share with participants resources and support to help Caregivers maintain their own well-being while supporting others. [Click here to watch video](#) – May 3.



[Blessing of the Hands Ceremony](#) is a traditional observance

during [National Nurses Week](#). The ceremony reflects the VA's deep appreciation for its nurses, who consistently go above and beyond to ensure the well-being of our nation's Veterans.

[Click here to watch video](#) – May 7.



[Raytheon](#) donated a large delivery of nonperishable goods to our Patriot Pantry. The Patriot Pantry provides support to our Veterans at risk of food insecurities – May 9.



[Local historian and Veteran James Christopher](#) sat down with our Media Team to discuss his military service and his Traveling African American Museum. Full interview coming soon – May 13.



[14th Annual VA2K Walk & Roll](#) recognized the importance of the Whole Health initiative and encouraged support to Homeless Veteran Program. Employees and Veterans participated in a 2-Kilometer walk and other wellness and mindfulness activities throughout the day. Donations were accepted for Veterans experiencing homelessness. [Click here to watch video](#) – May 15.



[SAVAHCS Chaplains](#) held a training event to equip local community clergy members with information about Veteran-centric issues. Classes focused on suicide prevention and moral injury – May 21.



[Creative Arts Festival](#) registration and information event was held at SAVAHCS for Veteran artists of every form, musicians, sculptors, photographers, painters and more. For more information go to: <https://department.va.gov/.../national-veterans-creative.../> – May 21



[SAVAHCS Research Week](#) our staff engaged in learning opportunities, and a special presentation by Marc Wynne, Deputy Chief Research and Development Officer, who spoke on research and development transformations designed to better serve our nation's Veterans – May 23.



[Memorial Day Cards](#) were delivered by Councilman Fimbres, a 28-year Army Veteran. The cards were distributed to our inpatient Veterans. We are thankful to Councilman Fimbres for his service and dedication to our Veterans. We are also thankful for the eight schools that participated in making the cards and posters – May 24.



[Girl Scouts of Southern Arizona Troop 60](#) showed their appreciation for our nation's Veterans and the dedicated staff at SAVAHCS by selecting them as the recipients of their Gift of Caring this year – May 24.



[The Tucson Area Office and Tucson Indian Center](#) met with SAVAHCS Leadership to discuss collaborative efforts to improve healthcare access and services for Native American Veterans. The meeting signifies a commitment to working together to ensure these Veterans receive the care they deserve – May 24.



[Heroes for Hope](#) hosted by Tucson Indian Center was attended by our SAVAHCS Outreach Team. The team provided information and resources on suicide prevention and eligibility and enrollment to Veterans and family members in attendance – May 29.

SAVAHCS Updates and Accomplishments

Memorial Day Murph Challenge

Our very own Dr. Joshua Appel, Chief of Emergency Medicine, shares his experience with the birth of The Murph Challenge, which typically consists of A Mile Run, 100 Pull Ups, 200 Pushups, 300 Squats, and another Mile Run. But, as Dr. Appel points out, Murph can be any workout. [Click here to watch video.](#)

SAVAHCS DAISY Award Winners

Congratulations to SAVAHCS DAISY Award winners [Bayani Bunal and Windy Tulino](#). Both Nurse Practitioners serve Veterans in the Community Living Center and have been recognized for excellence in their skills and exceptional patient care.

Veterans Help Veterans to Choose VA Health Care

Anthony Starace was unexpectedly diagnosed with a malignant growth on the brain, which changed his life. Despite a difficult prognosis he continued to live life to the fullest. Sadly, on May 7, 2024, cancer took his life, but his message to fellow Veterans endures, utilize VA health care benefits. Read the rest of the story [here](#).

SAVAHCS Bee Award Recipient

SAVAHCS is proud to congratulate [Nursing Assistant Kaytelin Jackson](#) on being named a BEE award recipient! The BEE award recognizes nurses who demonstrate exceptional, compassionate patient care.

PACT Act has expanded VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances, helping to provide generations of Veterans and their survivors with the care and benefits they have earned and deserve.

- As of May 31, we have screened over 50,580 Veterans for Toxic Exposure Screenings.

Standing Ready to Serve Veterans' Spiritual Needs

Amidst one of the most sacred religious times of year with Lent, Passover and Ramadan, Southern Arizona Health Care System (SAVAHCS) shines a light on the work their Chaplains do for Veterans. Read the rest of the story [here](#).

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): Building 90's expansion project for Outpatient Mental Health begins its transition to phase two! The first phase expanded the northwest side of Building 90 by approximately 7,600 square feet. On Monday, February 26, installation began for new furniture and equipment as well as other various finishing touches. The new space is slated to be fully usable and available for move-in by the end of March. Completion of the project is currently planned for late 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.

Auditorium Stage Renovations The renovations on the building 4 Auditorium are underway. As a result, the outside sitting area will be **closed-off until May 20**. Temporary fencing and signs will be placed around the area.

Roof Repair Projects on Roofs B50, 60, 78 and 90, will continue Phase 1 of Bldg. 90. There will be 2 areas coned off in the back loading area for storing material and loading material to the roof. Please stay clear of these areas and follow the instructions of the ground guides for your own safety. Work on the roof Bldg. 90 will continue Tuesday to Friday, through the end of June.

Emergency Department Expansion: The design is complete. Construction funding has been tentatively approved for FY24.

Veteran Health Care Information

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

Cleland-Dole: Mental Health Copay Exemption

Veterans who owe [copays](#) for outpatient mental health and substance use disorder visits now have easier access to the soonest and best care. VA is canceling and

refunding the first three mental health and substance use disorder copays in each calendar year between June 27, 2023, and December 29, 2027. [Learn more.](#)

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.

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 and Press 1, chat online at Chat (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 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 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, 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>.

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
- Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) (formerly Voluntary Services) 520-629-1822
- 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
- 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