



September 2023
SAVAHCS Director's Report
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 Director

Hot Topics

PACT ACT SPECIAL HEALTH CARE ENROLLMENT PERIOD

Visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) to learn more!

Did you serve in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War?

—OR—

Did you serve in combat against hostile forces after November 11, 1998?

—AND—

Were you discharged or released between 09/11/2001 and 10/01/2013?

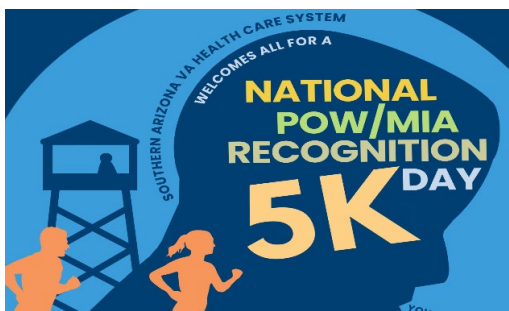
It's free, no annual costs, and your health care may be free as well!



- **The Next PACT Act Deadline: Health Care Enrollment for Arizona Veterans who deployed to Combat Zones** - Until 11:59pm local time on September 30, 2023, Veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left active duty between September 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013, are eligible to enroll directly in VA health care. This special enrollment period gives Veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other combat zones an opportunity to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits.



- **The Department of Veterans Affairs is deploying more than two dozen mobile medical units to expand health care access to homeless and at-risk Veterans** - The first of 25 units arrived at the VA Orlando Healthcare System. The others will be rolled out over the next six months in cities across the country. Mobile medical units are vans or trucks that move from one location to another to provide access to a private space for Veterans to meet with medical providers for primary care, women's health, audiology, laboratory, and telehealth services. SAVAHCs is expected to receive their unit in January 2024.



- **SAVAHCS POW/MIA Recognition Ceremony and 5K Run** - SAVAHCs in collaboration with Davis Mothan Air Force Base will be hosting a 5K Run followed by POW/MIA Ceremony honoring our POW/MIA Veterans. The event will be held on the main campus, Friday, September 15, 2023. The 5K Run begins at 6:15, followed by the National Anthem at 8 a.m. Recognition Ceremony begins in Building 4 Conference Rooms A/B at the conclusion of the Anthem.



- **Million Veteran Program (MVP)** - If you are a Vietnam Veteran, joining the Million Veteran Program could help other Veterans who served with you. At the Million Veteran Program, researchers are studying how military experiences and exposures affect Veteran health. All Veterans can learn more and join today at www.mvp.va.gov.

- **Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) Mental Health Quarterly Open House**
SAVAHCS will be hosting a virtual and in person Mental Health Quarterly Open House on Wednesday, September 20, 2023, from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. The purpose for the Mental Health Open House is to bring together key stakeholders in the community with the goal of enhancing access to mental health services and addressing the mental healthcare needs of Veterans and their family members residing in Southern Arizona.
- **CMS Overall Hospital Star Ratings**
The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) 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](#). The Star Ratings are based on performance metrics across 5 broad categories of care. These include mortality, safety of care, readmission, patient experience, and timely and effective care. This was the first time VA hospitals were included in the CMS Star Ratings. The more stars (out of 5), the better a hospital performed on the available quality measures. The CMS star ratings are based on data from July 2018 to March 2022.

The SAVAHCS received an overall 3-star rating and a 4-star Patient Experience Rating. The SAVAHCS is committed to providing world-class care to every Veteran who walks through our doors, and we will never settle for anything less. We are laser-focused on improving the level of care at the Tucson VA Medical Center and continue improvements and key changes in metrics related to the inpatient experience such as the quietness of the hospital and the information received upon discharge, as well as other quality measures that focus on timely interventions for sepsis care and reducing hospital readmissions. We are committed to providing the best possible care to every Veteran, every time.

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

- **OIG Report**
In 2017, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated the OIG Comprehensive Healthcare Inspection Program (CHIP) reviews. CHIP combines inpatient and outpatient reviews into a single evaluation of the facility programs and is performed approximately every three years. The OIG conducted the CHIP review of the SAVAHCS beginning on Monday, March 21, 2022, and it concluded on Friday, March 25, 2022.

CHIP inspectors reviewed the following areas at the SAVAHCS:

- Leadership and Organizational Risk
- Quality, Safety, and Value
- Medical Staff Privileging
- Environment of Care
- Mental Health Emergency Department/Urgent Care Centers

On August 2, 2023, the OIG published the SAVAHCS final report. There were no recommendations in two categories (Quality, Safety, and Value and Medical Staff Privileging). The SAVAHCS received six recommendations in three areas listed below. In each case the Director is responsible for determining any additional reasons for non-compliance, and ensuring action plans are fully implemented:

- Leadership and Organizational Risk – one recommendation
- Environment of Care – four recommendations (two of the four are already closed)
- Mental Health Emergency Department/Urgent Care Centers' Suicide Prevention Initiatives – one recommendation

We thank the Office of Inspector General for their thorough review and opportunity to improve the care provided to our nation's Veterans. The SAVAHCS remains committed to ensuring our Veterans receive exceptional health care.

- **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
 - 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 Congratulates the First Class of Dietetic Interns:**

The SAVAHCS celebrated the graduation of the first class of Dietetic Interns in August. Two interns completed all requirements to earn Registered Dietitian credentials. Three interns were matched to the program for the 2023-2024 academic year. In August, the SAVAHCS Dietetic Internship was awarded stipend funding through the Office of Academic Affairs for a class of four interns, for academic year 2024-2025. This was a competitive process and we are proud of the program's recognition and growth.
- **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 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

- SAVAHCS Outreach Team attended the Cochise County Veterans Stand Down to provide the following services: Beneficiary Travel, Eligibility and Enrollment, Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program, Suicide Prevention, - Environmental Registry, IDEA, and HUD-VASH – August 18
- SAVAHCS Outreach Team and Executive Leadership attended the 14th Annual Gathering of American Indian Veterans Event. Many Veterans were present to enjoy the celebration and presentations on PACT Act benefits, employment programs and VA health care eligibility – August 19
- SAVAHCS presented the People's Choice Awards to the winners of the VA Creative Arts Festival Competition. We are proud of all the talented Veterans who contributed their works for display and judging – August 24
- U. S. House Representative Juan Ciscomani from Arizona's 6th Congressional District, and his team met with SAVAHCS Executive Leadership to discuss VA health care initiatives, Suicide Prevention, and Veteran claims at SAVAHCS associated with the PACT Act. Representative Ciscomani was then accompanied on a driving tour of the campus and the SAVAHCS Fisher House – August 24
- The SAVAHCS Federal Women's Special Emphasis Program Managers, hosted a table in the lobby of building 80. They distributed information on Women's Equality Day, and conducted fun activities for our staff and Veterans – August 25



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

- **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 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 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

