

# VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION PRIORITIES & STRATEGIC ENABLERS

6 Effective Ways to Drive  
Change and Innovation  
Within VHA

January 2023



**VA**



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration

“

**TO CARE FOR HIM WHO SHALL HAVE  
BORNE THE BATTLE AND FOR HIS  
WIDOW AND HIS ORPHAN**

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

”



# From the **UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH**

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Priorities & Strategic Enablers

## **Dear Supporters,**

Serving more than 9 million Veterans as the largest integrated health care system in the country, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is truly remarkable in its ability to address the concerns of diverse Veterans in diverse locations. VA's Research and Development has not only put VHA on the cutting edge of medical treatment for Veterans, but also benefited the entire country by sharing those innovations with private sector partners across the nation. We continue to prioritize critical efforts like Telehealth and Electronic Health Record Modernization because they hold the promise of both improving care for Veterans and serving as a model for transformative health care innovation.

What makes VA so special is our employees, who are selflessly committed to our mission of helping Veterans and their families. In 2021, after almost two years of employees working tirelessly during the COVID-19 pandemic, VA was in the Top 5 Best Places to Work among large agencies in the federal government.

Our staff, a third of whom are Veterans themselves, represent the best of the best, and their professionalism is nothing short of exceptional. Walk through any VHA facility, as I have been privileged to do, and you will find the most dedicated, hardest-working

professionals in health care. My philosophy in leading organizations is that everybody shows up wanting to do their best. But they cannot do their best to advance the health and care of our nation's Veterans if we, as leaders, are not giving them access to the most efficient processes, systems and workflows.

This magazine tells the story of where we are, what we have done and how we will move toward recovering from the impacts of the pandemic to better meet our mission.

I believe that the VHA Priorities and Strategic Enablers are foundational to every decision we make in supporting VHA's long-range goals. They are informed by comprehensive public and private reports, as well as Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), Congress, unions and other partners. My interactions with VA leadership and employees, as well as direct discussions with Veterans, have also contributed to my commitment to these top priorities.

The High Reliability Organization (HRO) value of "It's About the Veteran," says it all. The Priorities and Enablers in this magazine will help VHA, as an organization, turbocharge our employees' efforts as we move toward pandemic recovery by removing barriers and building upon the great work we have already been doing to care for Veterans.

**Shereef Elnahal, M.D., M.B.A.**

Under Secretary for Health (USH)  
United States Department of Veterans Affairs









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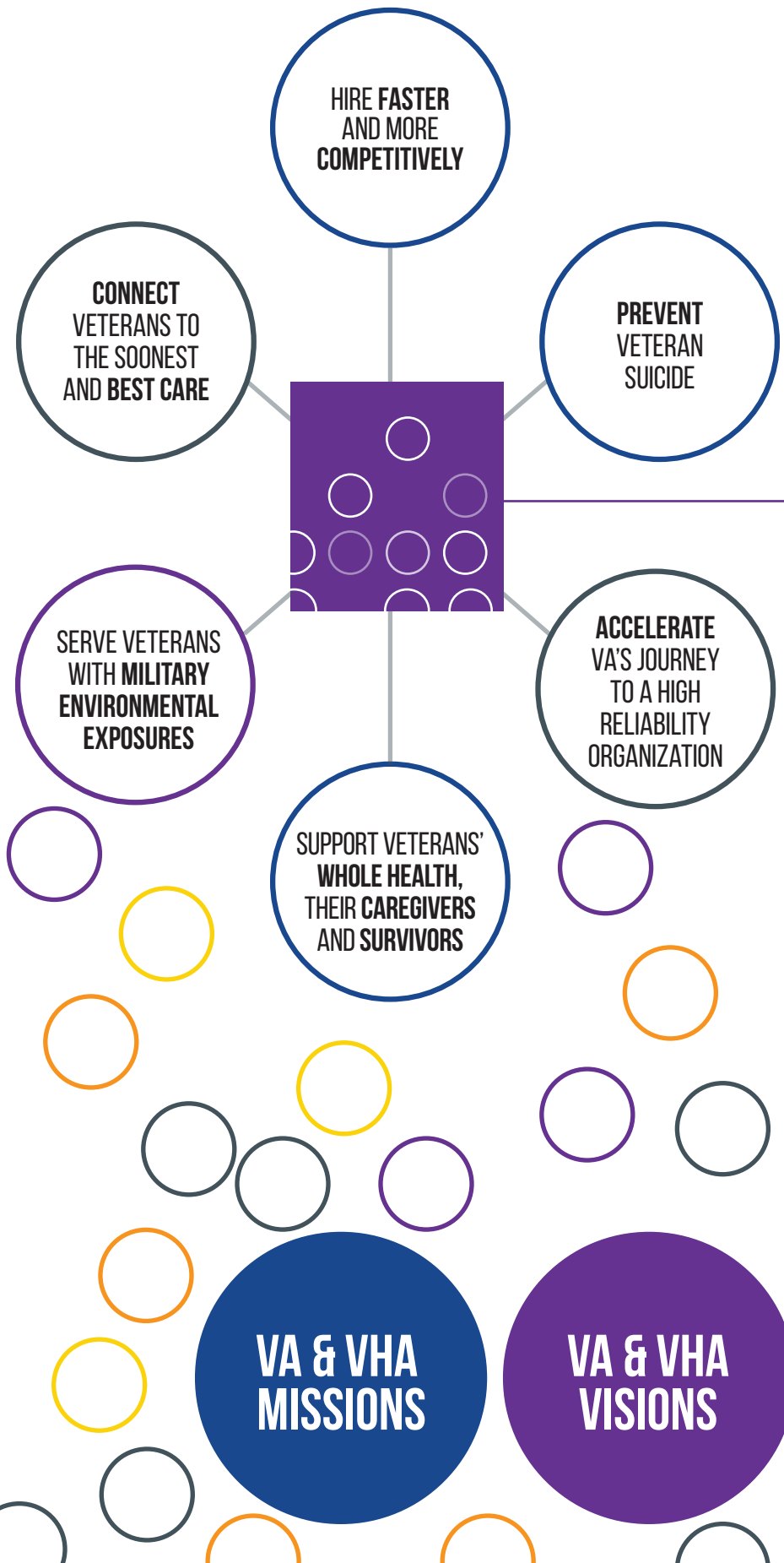
# PRIORITIES

## VHA PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC ENABLERS

**V**HA has a history of providing exceptional and groundbreaking care. The VHA Priorities and Strategic Enablers stand on the mission, vision and values of VA, from Lincoln’s “. . .to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan. . .” to Omar Bradley’s “We’re dealing with Veterans, not procedures, with their problems, not ours,” and of course our VA I CARE values and the VHA Long-Range Plan Framework.

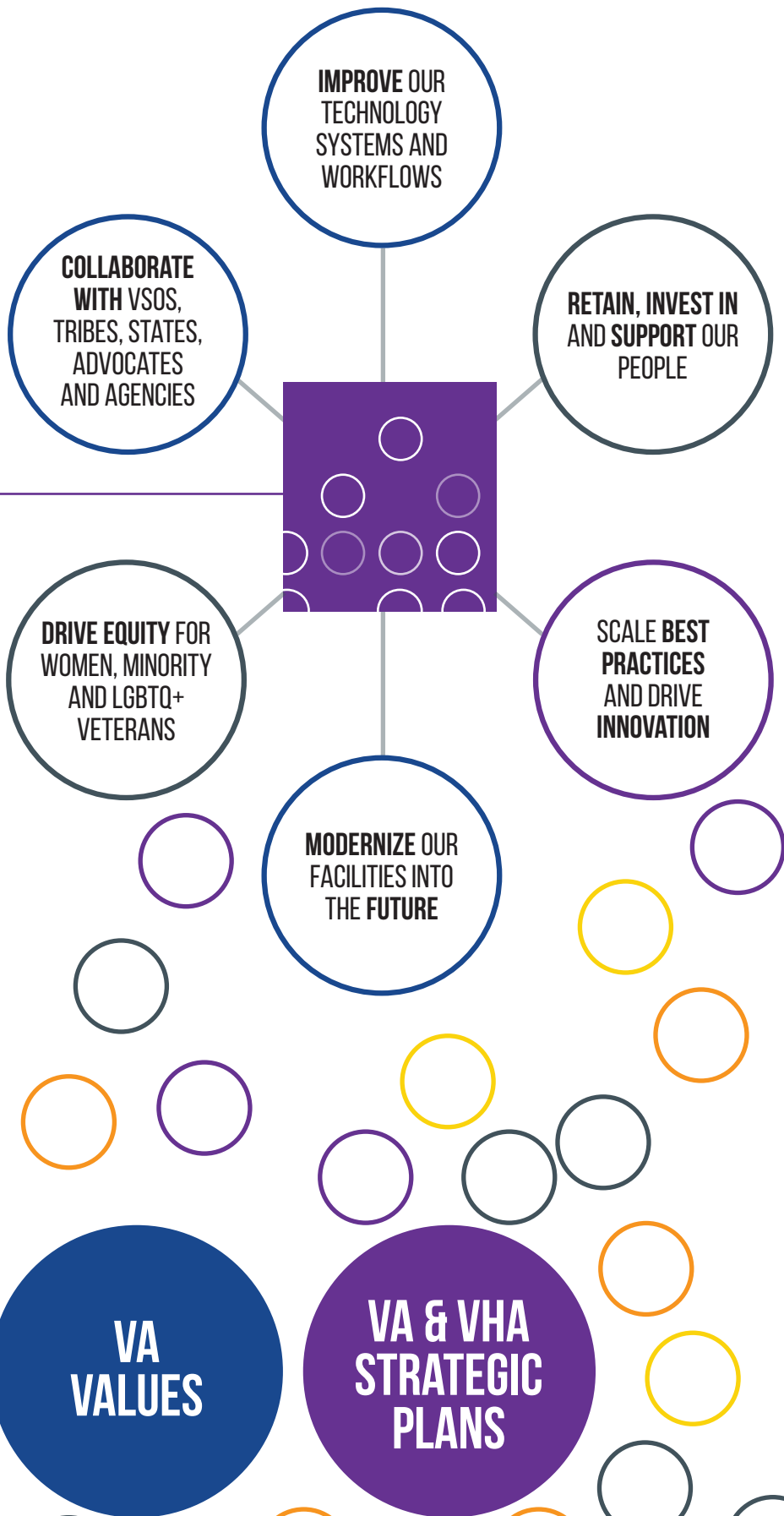
The Priorities and Enablers detail how VHA can improve its operations and marshal its resources to advance Veteran health and care. All 6 Priorities are critical to VHA’s success, with no one being more important than another. They all support VHA’s long-range goals by focusing on how VHA turbocharges these efforts, and build upon the exceptional work everyone has been doing.

So, why the filigree circles throughout this magazine? These circles represent an infinite loop of continuous improvement, commitment and innovation. Circles represent progress — moving things forward and representing positive change, new and fresh perspectives and the wholeness of VHA’s health care system.





# STRATEGIC ENABLERS





# HIRE **FASTER** AND MORE **COMPETITIVELY**

## VHA PRIORITY

### USH INTRO

One of our top priorities is to improve the VA hiring process. Fulfilling VA's mission to provide the top-notch care our Veterans deserve is only possible with an enterprise-wide team of the best and brightest in their respective fields. To hire the best, we must speed up the hiring process. We cannot lose quality candidates to competitors because it took us too long to make an offer. And to retain the best, we must take care of our employees with competitive wages and benefits so they can focus on taking care of our Veterans.

### TRANSFORMING CUSTOMER AND EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES

- Expedite the hiring process to improve an employee's first impression of VHA
- Offer a new kind of onboarding experience defined by our Candidate Care Model – one that proactively identifies candidates' needs, considers diverse perspectives and employs a human-centered design approach to make onboarding an easy, effective process
- Collaborate across VHA to eliminate operational inefficiencies and create a seamless experience


### ADVANCING OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Since March 2022, VA has updated nearly 400 pay tables and increased salaries for more than 7,000 employees, due to the RAISE Act
- VHA has increased inclusivity, diversity, equity and access in VHA recruiting and established partnerships with Minority Serving Institution colleges and universities
- The PACT Act will allow VA to offer more competitive salaries for select occupations, which will expand VA's talent pool and help retain our health care workforce

### WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN DO

- Follow standardized hiring processes and procedures that were developed based on best practices and feedback from customers and employees
- Partner with Human Resources (HR) and hiring managers to pinpoint the organization's specific needs and help them target the best candidate





**EVERYTHING WE DO IS POWERED BY OUR PEOPLE. IT IS OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY TO AMPLIFY HIRING AND RETENTION. WE NEED TO BE LASER FOCUSED ON GETTING AND RETAINING THE BEST SO THAT WE CAN PROVIDE THE BEST POSSIBLE CARE.**

- DR. SHEREEF ELNAHAL



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## **BUILD UPON...**

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### **ONBOARDING EMPLOYEES FASTER**

Implement recommendations from a multidisciplinary team of 30 VHA leaders who examined every aspect of the onboarding process: employee physicals, credentialing and privileging, pay setting, personnel security and other onboarding requirements. Recommendations include:

- Eliminate the Professional Standards Boards for Title 38 occupations and physicians, dentists and podiatrists
- Create one scheduling tool for applicants to self-schedule their drug test, fingerprinting and physical
- Conduct onboarding surge events on a recurring basis to expedite candidates through pre-employment activities for an earlier start date

### **ACCELERATING HR SPECIALIST TRAINING AND READINESS (HR STAR)**

The HR STAR Program is designed to train professionals in the HR Specialist occupational series as part of succession and retention planning within VHA. HR STAR will:

- Support 1,000 new HR STAR trainee positions each year
- Take one year to complete the standardized curriculum, which addresses the critical skill sets and training required for HR professionals in a specific track
- Use a sophisticated and interactive educational learning platform and be entirely virtual

### **INVESTING IN VA EMPLOYEES**

In 2022, VA has taken several steps to realize the Secretary's goal to make every VA job a good job, where all employees are engaged, supported, heard and empowered:

- Maximized use of all available hiring authorities
- Authorized incentives higher than 25% and bonuses up to 50% of employees' salaries
- Expanded career development programs and opened leadership opportunities to all employees
- Expanded scholarship and student loan repayment programs in critical areas of need
- Increased the income cap from \$89,000 to \$149,000/year to cover childcare costs



## Improve our technology systems and workflows

Building on learning from the pandemic to maintain the safe delivery of high-quality care, creating new care modalities that enhance quality while optimizing resources like virtual care

- Standardize and streamline use of HRSmart and USASTaffing as systems of record for hiring
- Automate pay scheduling
- Provide greater visibility into hiring activities



## Scale best practices and drive innovation

Forging a healthier future for Veterans and the nation. Providing world-class care while leveraging cutting-edge research

- Implement succession planning framework
- Leverage human-centered design to reimagine the employee experience



## Retain, invest in and support our people

Improving VHA's culture to further support the overall well-being of every employee

- Reduce Employee Burnout and Optimize Organizational Thriving (REBOOT) – Chief Clinician Wellbeing Officer and Mental Health Support
- Standardize scheduling flexibility for VHA employees
- Maximize new PACT Act authorities





## Drive equity for women, minority and LGBTQ+ Veterans



Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion in everything we do in VA. Ensuring providers are racially and ethnically diverse and trained in delivering culturally competent care

- Increase specialized recruitment, including but not limited to announcements in Historically Black Colleges and Universities Connect (HCBUConnect.com) and partnerships with Minority Serving Institutions (MSI)
- Offer All Employee Survey (AES) briefings to present Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA) data and tools to leaders
- Embed I-DEA practices in leadership programs and VHA services

## Modernize our facilities into the future



Developing technologies, systems solutions and best practices that reinforce VA as a 21st Century health care system. Ensuring our facilities, equipment and systems support providing the highest quality care

- Maximize the use of scheduling flexibilities to provide employees with better work-life balance, including alternate work schedules, telework, 72/80 RN schedules, part-time and job sharing

## Collaborate with VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and agencies



Leveraging stakeholder expertise through strategic engagement of VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and other agencies

- Use VA Careers to expand the reach of VHA job opportunities
- Work with the Office of Personnel Management to remove barriers to streamline hiring



# CONNECT VETERANS TO THE SOONEST AND BEST CARE

## VHA PRIORITY

### USH INTRO

To deliver the soonest and best care possible to Veterans, VHA is incorporating technology into all aspects of the health care experience from setting appointments to meeting with a provider. Technology allows Veterans to benefit from more convenient, patient-centered care. This includes access to electronic health records from home or through a mobile device via MyHealthVet, as well as telehealth solutions that ensure Veterans get the right care in the right place at the right time, from a location of their choice.

#### ENSURING ACCESS TO TIMELY CARE

- The best health care is only effective if it is delivered on time. We must have both quality and timeliness to provide excellent care
- VA is always looking for new ways to deliver care to Veterans to reduce wait times, create efficiency in care delivery and ensure the best health care possible
- Every Veteran should have access to the best care available. We can accomplish that with virtual care, community care and collaborative opportunities

#### ADVANCING OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- VHA completed 78.8 million care visits — combined face-to-face and virtual care — plus 15.2 million mental health visits during Fiscal Year 2021. Seventeen percent of all appointments were completed the same day the appointment was requested
- Our redesigned website, [www.accesstocare.va.gov](http://www.accesstocare.va.gov), allows Veterans and caregivers to search local VA facilities for providers, health care performance, satisfaction data and average wait times by specialty (updated daily!)
- Integrated Veteran Care (IVC) provides trusted, timely, equitable, high-quality care for our Veterans and beneficiaries
- VHA established a standard for all providers that maximizes outpatient care capacity for Veterans

#### WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN DO

- Front-line employees will be given the tools they need for full visibility of care options for Veterans
- Employees will connect Veterans to high-quality care through objective data about the institutions and providers caring for Veterans
- Offer comprehensive and compassionate women's health services
- Listen to and continue to improve our support to Veterans' caregivers
- Offer Veterans all clinically appropriate options for their care, whether through telehealth, in a VA facility or the community



**WE HAVE TO PRIORITIZE MAKING (ACCESS) BETTER  
SO THAT WE ARE CONFIDENTLY OFFERING ALL THE  
OPTIONS TO OUR VETERANS AND CONNECTING THEM  
TO THAT SOONEST AND BEST CARE OPTION...**

**- DR. SHEREEF ELNAHAL**

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## **BUILD UPON...**

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### **ACCESS INITIATIVES**

- Support telehealth usage to enhance accessibility to care, resolve access gaps in underserved communities and match rare clinical expertise to Veterans with unique clinical needs
- Enhance VHA's ability to align needed resources to provide all Veterans with quality, timely access to care, regardless of location or modality of care
- Use lessons learned, taking a VHA-wide approach that uses all available resources to ensure Veterans receive the care that they need, when they need it
- Create standardized processes across VA that have the greatest potential to positively impact Veterans' access to care

### **CARE COORDINATION**

- Improve the Veteran's journey from the point where care is identified to the time care is received
- Identify strong care coordination practices and engage with program offices, VA Medical Centers and Network Directors to review and evaluate existing procedures and training
- Optimize coordination of care through patient identification and management

### **REFERRAL COORDINATION INITIATIVE (RCI)**

- RCI teams help build trust and improve Veteran experience by providing the Veteran more timely access to convenient and appropriate health care options
- Dedicated Referral Coordination Teams (RCTs) focus on working one-on-one with Veterans and empowering them with their health care options so they can make informed decisions regarding where, how and when they receive their health care



### Retain, invest in and support our people

Improving VHA's culture to further support the overall well-being of every employee

- VHA Reproductive Health Field Readiness
- Integrated Scheduling
- Telehealth and other digital health services
- Train staff on connected health literacy



### Scale best practices and drive innovation

Forging a healthier future for Veterans and the nation. Providing world-class care while leveraging cutting-edge research

- Care Coordination
- Referral Coordination Initiative (RCI)
- Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients




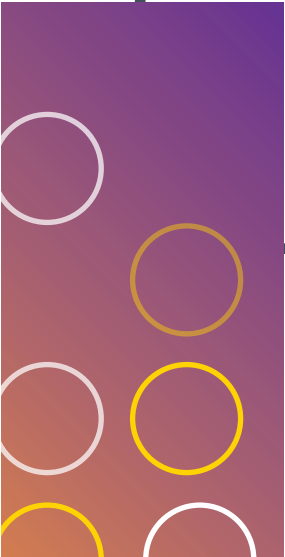
### Improve our technology systems and workflows

Building on learning from the pandemic to maintain the safe delivery of high-quality care, creating new care modalities that enhance quality while optimizing resources like virtual care

- Universal Access Deployment (UAD)
- Referral Coordination Initiative (RCI)
- Invest in telehealth infrastructure








## Drive equity for women, minority and LGBTQ+ Veterans

Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion in everything we do in VA. Ensuring providers are racially and ethnically diverse and trained in delivering culturally competent care


- Connections through specialized care coordinators for minority, women and LGBTQ+ Veterans and DE&I managers at VA medical centers
- Equitable health care including partnering with tribal health, gender-affirming care for Veterans, women's reproductive health and access to Community Care
- Equity dashboards to reduce disparities in health outcomes among Veterans



## Modernize our facilities into the future

Developing technologies, systems solutions and best practices that reinforce VA as a 21st Century health care system. Ensuring our facilities, equipment and systems support providing the highest quality care

- Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options for Veterans (MAMMO) Act
- Virtual Health Care Services (VHCS)
- Access to Care website



## Collaborate with VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and agencies

Leveraging stakeholder expertise through strategic engagement of VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and other agencies

- Preventive Health Initiative (flu campaign, monkeypox, COVID-19)
- Disaster Response Guides



# SERVE VETERANS WITH **MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURES**

## VHA PRIORITY

### USH INTRO

On August 10, 2022, the President signed into law the The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act. This once-in-a-generation law ensures Veterans qualify for benefits and health care to treat illnesses resulting from exposure to toxins or other hazards during their service. It is now our responsibility to implement the PACT Act and deliver its promises to Veterans. We must swiftly and effectively prepare our delivery system to treat more Veterans affected by military environmental exposure, conduct additional research on military environmental exposures, and implement the authorities included in the Act to ensure we hire and retain the best staff possible to treat affected Veterans.

### **REACHING ALL VETERANS AFFECTED BY MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURE**

The PACT Act expands and extends VA health care eligibility for Veterans of the Vietnam War, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras with military environmental exposures:

- VHA is developing outreach plans to educate current VA patients and Veterans not currently receiving care at VA. These outreach plans will inform Veterans about service locations where military environmental exposure may have occurred, as well as possible health conditions attributed to military environmental exposures

### **SERVING VETERANS AFFECTED BY MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURE**

- VHA is training personnel to identify, treat and assess the impact of illnesses related to military environmental exposure on Veterans and training claims processors to review claims related to military environmental exposure
- VA will lead collaboration with other federal agencies to create an interagency Toxic Exposure Research Working Group with the goal of developing and executing a 5-year strategic research plan to better understand the health consequences of toxic exposures
- The PACT Act authorizes funding for 31 VA facility leases across 19 states

### **WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN DO**

- Complete “PACT Act 101 Overview” training
- Understand the PACT Act, including new health care eligibility and newly established presumptive conditions
- Educate Veterans and their families about the new benefits, health care eligibility and services under the PACT Act
- Complete WRIISC MOD-1 training: All physicians, registered nurses, advanced practice nurses, psychologists and social workers must complete the WRIISC MOD-1— “Assessing Deployment Related Environmental Exposures” course



**WE MUST BE LASER FOCUSED ON TREATING ILLNESS  
RESULTING FROM EXPOSURE TO TOXINS IN DIFFERENT  
THEATERS OF DEPLOYMENT.**

**- DR. SHEREEF ELNAHAL**



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## **BUILD UPON...**

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### **VETERANS EXPOSURE RESOURCES**

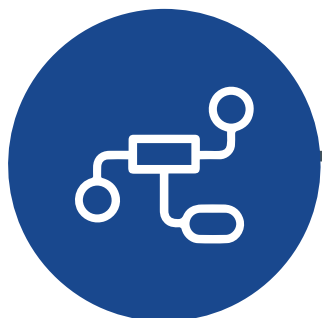
- The PACT Act will expand the Veterans Exposure Team Health Outcomes of Military Exposures (VET-HOME) program, which will become operational in 2023. VET-HOME will provide a website and phone number for access to resources and services related to military exposures and focus on increased personalized care for Veterans with unique exposures
- VA is continuing to encourage Veterans to go online and fill out the Burn Pit Registry form. VA is making several changes to the registry to expand eligibility and make it easier to use

### **TREATING VETERANS' WHOLE HEALTH**

- Due to the wide-range of health concerns that can arise from military environmental exposures, VA will build upon our whole health approach to ensure a “Veteran-centric,” timely and efficient delivery of health care

### **PACT ACT**

- VHA is ready and excited for the opportunity to provide care for several million more deserving Veterans as a result of the PACT Act
- To learn more about the expansion and extension of health care eligibility and benefits, visit [www.VA.gov/PACT](http://www.VA.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MY-VA-411



### Improve our technology systems and workflows

Building on learning from the pandemic to maintain the safe delivery of high-quality care, creating new care modalities that enhance quality while optimizing resources like virtual care

- VET-HOME Toxic Exposure Intake Center



### Scale best practices and drive innovation

Forging a healthier future for Veterans and the nation. Providing world-class care while leveraging cutting-edge research

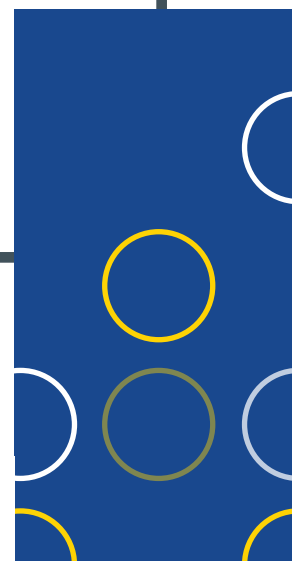
- VET-HOME
- PACT Act – Toxic Exposure Screening



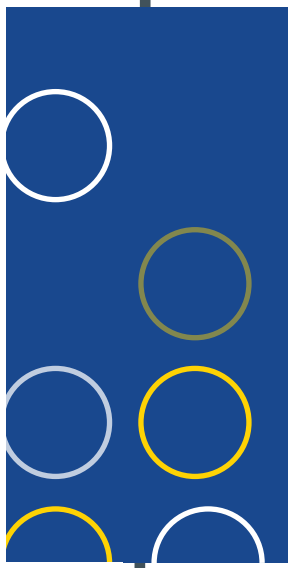
### Retain, invest in and support our people

Improving VHA's culture to further support the overall well-being of every employee

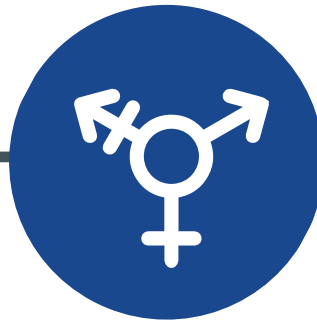
- Title IX of the PACT Act increases VHA's ability to serve Veterans who have been exposed to burn pits and other military environmental exposures







### **Drive equity for women, minority and LGBTQ+ Veterans**



Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion in everything we do in VA. Ensuring providers are racially and ethnically diverse and trained in delivering culturally competent care

- Equitable outreach and education programs
- Access for underserved communities
- Convert to gender-neutral language

### **Modernize our facilities into the future**



Developing technologies, systems solutions and best practices that reinforce VA as a 21st Century health care system. Ensuring our facilities, equipment and systems support providing the highest quality care

- Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options for Veterans (MAMMO) Act
- Virtual Health Care Services (VHCS)
- Access to Care website

### **Collaborate with VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and agencies**



Leveraging stakeholder expertise through strategic engagement of VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and other agencies

- Interagency Toxic Exposure Research Working Group

# ACCELERATE VA'S JOURNEY TO A HIGH RELIABILITY ORGANIZATION

## VHA PRIORITY

### USH INTRO

Every day across VHA, dedicated employees deliver safe, high-quality care to Veterans. Our staff continuously weaves High Reliability Organization (HRO) principles and values into the fabric of our culture by continually asking, “What does this have to do with helping a Veteran?” HROs experience fewer accidents, despite operating in complex, high-risk environments. As of October 2022, more than 93% of staff have completed HRO Baseline training. HRO is a part of our everyday work in VHA; now it’s time to turbocharge it.

### PRIORITIZING VETERAN SAFETY

- VHA is on a journey to become the safest health care system in the nation. When a Veteran enters one of our facilities, they should believe our system is set up “to do no harm”
- Our Veterans deserve the safest, highest-quality care possible, and our employees deserve the best environment, training, resources and systems to provide it

### ADVANCING OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 1990s: VHA began adopting HRO practices
- 2019: Formalized our commitment to HRO, building on expert work in patient safety and improvement
- 2020–2022: HRO implementation efforts expanded to all sites across VHA
- May 2021: Patient Safety Team began supporting Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM), exemplifying “HRO in Action”
- April 2022: Began pilot to expand and integrate HRO, which will inform the 2023 roll out

### WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN DO

- All VHA staff can register for the HRO 101 and 201 courses on TMS
- All leaders value expertise and diversity and empower their teams to continuously improve
- Just Culture means all front-line workers have the power to identify something unsafe, “stop the line” and report it on behalf of Veteran safety
- Promote patient safety by encouraging VHA staff to report potential and actual patient safety events
- Report system errors to take a proactive approach to change processes and mitigate harm to Veterans





**THERE'S NOT ONE FACILITY I'VE BEEN TO WHERE HIGH RELIABILITY WASN'T MENTIONED, AND WE'RE GOING TO TURBOCHARGE IT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.**

**- DR. SHEREEF ELNAHAL**



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## **BUILD UPON...**

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### **ENSURING VETERAN ACCESS**

- The Office of Primary Care oversees VHA's implementation of the patient-centered medical home and Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) models
- For the care of the large, diverse and geographically dispersed Veteran population — many with specialized care needs — Clinical Resource Hubs (CRHs) help address critical barriers such as long travel distances to clinical facilities, a shortage of qualified providers and other reasons why facilities have gaps in care or clinical service

### **ENHANCING VETERAN CARE**

- The Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) in VA's Office of Research and Development optimizes VA services and care to help Veterans and their families stay healthy. QUERI supports a national network of 200+ investigators who have completed more than 500 peer-reviewed initiatives on VA priorities

### **RECOGNIZING EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT TO HRO**

The VHA National HeRO Awards are the highest level of HRO recognition within VHA. Demonstrating their commitment to HRO, the following employees were among the 2022 awardees:

- Dr. Matthew Leidl, VA Boston Healthcare System, identified and corrected an issue with drug file menu and dosage concentration
- The Dialysis Team at Wilmington VA Medical Center addressed faulty bloodlines on dialysis machines and issued a nationwide product alert
- Marie Fazzini, RN, Clarksburg VA Healthcare System, improved medication instruction labels



### Improve our technology systems and workflows

Building on learning from the pandemic to maintain the safe delivery of high-quality care, creating new care modalities that enhance quality while optimizing resources like virtual care

- Innovation Ecosystem
- National Center for Patient Care (NCPS) Team Training



### Scale best practices and drive innovation

Forging a healthier future for Veterans and the nation. Providing world-class care while leveraging cutting-edge research

- Pilot to expand and integrate HRO, which will inform the 2023 roll out
- Embrace HRO Pillar of Continuous Process Improvement
- Innovation Ecosystem



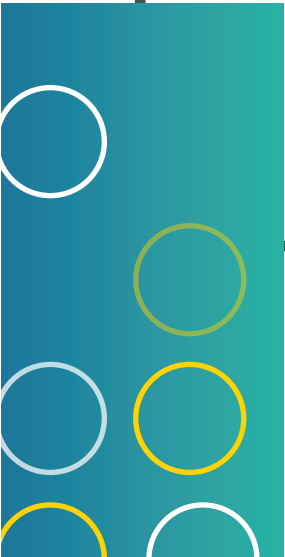
### Retain, invest in and support our people

Improving VHA's culture to further support the overall well-being of every employee

- Deepen HRO Implementation in alignment with the HRO Enterprise Operating Plan Guidance (FY23-25)
- HRO Leader Coaching
- High Reliability Training for Leaders and Implementers
- HRO Learning Ecosystem/Community of Practice







## Drive equity for women, minority and LGBTQ+ Veterans



Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion in everything we do in VA. Ensuring providers are racially and ethnically diverse and trained in delivering culturally competent care

- Inclusivity, respect and trust campaigns
- Enhance cultural competency and accountability and establish a safe environment for collaborative learning and improvement
- Comprehensive DE&I education, training and development programs and integration of equity into quality improvement processes
- Leverage the HRO Principle Deference to Expertise through empowering and valuing diversity

## Modernize our facilities into the future



Developing technologies, systems solutions and best practices that reinforce VA as a 21st Century health care system. Ensuring our facilities, equipment and systems support providing the highest quality care

- SimLEARN Pre-Construction Simulation
- High Reliability Data Visualization Platform

## Collaborate with VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and agencies



Leveraging stakeholder expertise through strategic engagement of VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and other agencies

- Share safety stories across the enterprise and with affiliates
- VA Emergency Ambulance Services



# SUPPORT VETERANS' **WHOLE HEALTH**, THEIR **CAREGIVERS** AND **SURVIVORS**

## VHA PRIORITY

### USH INTRO

VHA empowers and equips Veterans to take charge of their health and well-being and live life to the fullest. When we treat the entire person, and not just a particular symptom or disease, we not only care for a Veteran's most immediate health concerns but also consider what the Veteran needs and wants. Our Whole Health System of Care is already profoundly impacting Veterans' health and well-being. Still, it's time we did more by pushing the boundaries of how we expand Whole Health even further. Our Veterans deserve more because their sacrifice and our mission demand it of us.

### PRIORITIZING THE WHOLE VETERAN

VHA's approach to health care must be comprehensive and integrated. It must account for a Veteran's living situation, caregivers, and physical and mental health. Therefore, we must:


- Improve and strengthen the Caregiver Support Program
- Prevent homelessness by intervening as soon as possible
- Account for gender, culture and language preferences

### ADVANCING OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) put Veterans at the center of the care team
- Whole Health integration in Primary Care and Mental Health promotes whole-person care and shared decision-making
- Veterans who use Whole Health services report improved satisfaction with VA care, higher engagement in healthy behaviors, participation in health care decisions and improvements in overall well-being
- Clinical Resource Hubs (CRHs) manage the care of our large, diverse and geographically dispersed Veteran population — many with specialized care needs. CRHs help address critical barriers such as long distances to facilities, provider shortage and other gaps in care

### WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN DO

- Listen to Veterans and approach their care holistically to maximize their health and well-being
- Empower caregivers to identify and address concerns before they can cause additional hardships for Veterans and their families



**WHOLE HEALTH EXPANDS OUR VIEW BEYOND HEALTH CARE AND LOOKS AT THE INDIVIDUAL VETERAN'S GOALS. FOR EXAMPLE, EVERYTHING IS COMPROMISED WHEN A VETERAN ENTERS HOMELESSNESS: THEIR HEALTHCARE, THEIR WELL-BEING, THEIR MENTAL HEALTH.**

- DR. SHEREEF ELNAHAL



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## **BUILD UPON...**

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### **THE HOMELESS PROGRAMS OFFICE (HPO)**

The Homeless Programs Office (HPO) assists eligible Veterans and their families in obtaining permanent and sustainable housing with access to high-quality health care and supportive services by:

- Leading with an evidence-based, Housing First approach
- Reaching underserved Veterans
- Ensuring the delivery of quality supportive services
- Increasing the supply of and access to affordable housing

### **VETERANS CANTEEN SERVICE (VCS)**

The Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) provides items and services that contribute to the comfort and well-being of Veterans. As part of that mission, VCS is joining VA's Whole Health initiative by increasing its focus on fresh, healthy food options in our cafes and retail stores.

VCS also:

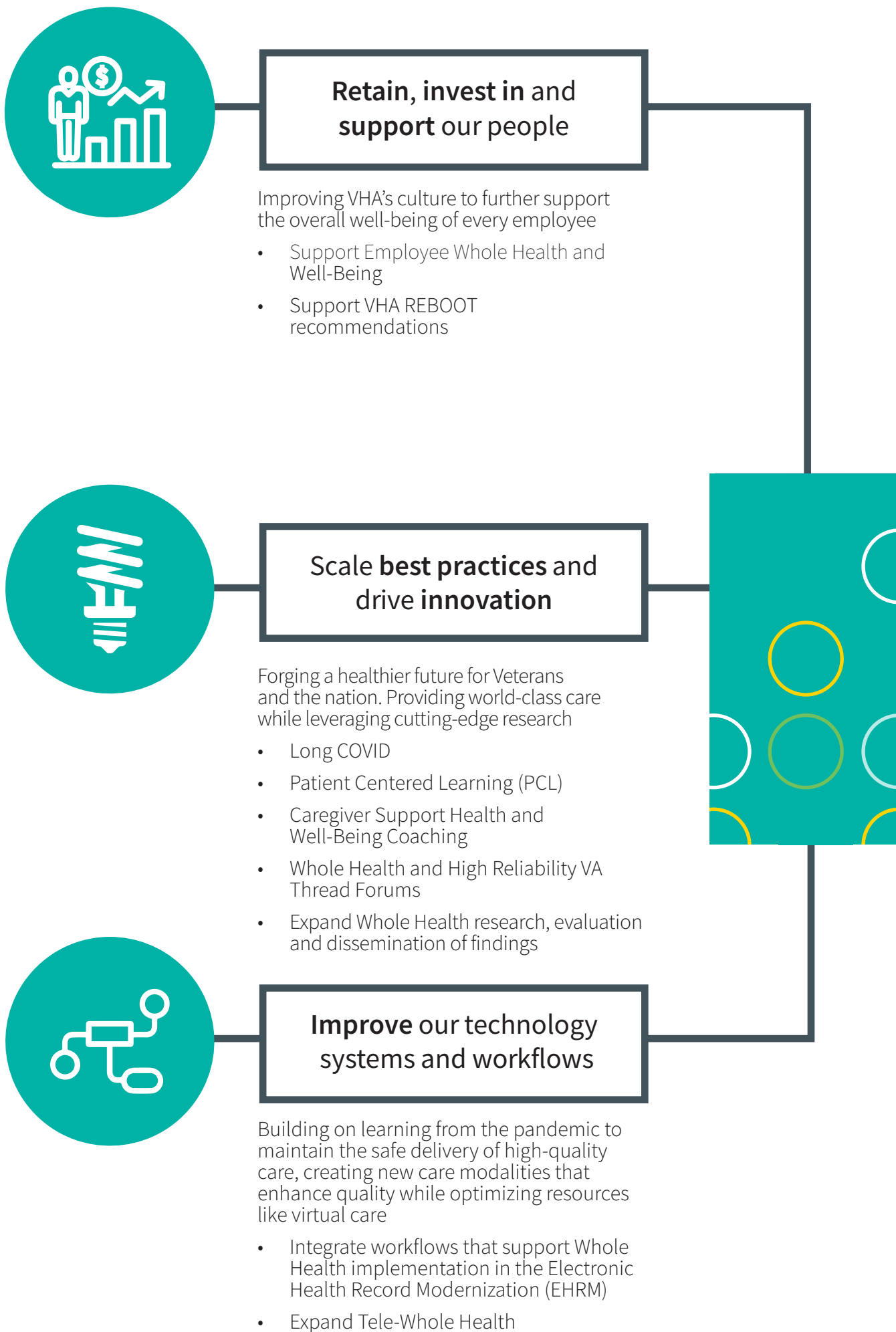
- Serves Whole Health food and merchandise throughout its 200 locations
- Allows Veterans to meet, gather, connect, relax and recharge in a welcoming space
- Provides reasonably priced merchandise and services for Veterans

### **THE WHOLE HEALTH APPROACH TO LONG COVID**

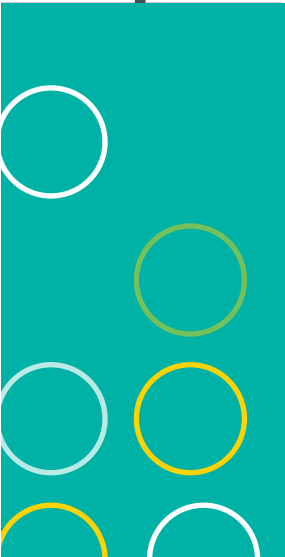
The Whole Health System approach to Long COVID addresses how COVID-19 affects each Veteran differently and then creates a personalized health plan.

The Whole Health System Approach to Long COVID PACT Guide:

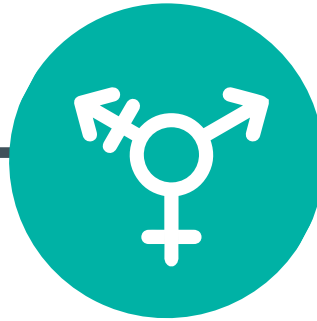
- Identifies the most common possible symptoms and recommends treatment based on a Whole Health approach
- Applies the Whole Health Systems approach to help facilities adopt standardized services that address the individual needs of Veterans experiencing symptoms, depending on facility size and the population







**Drive equity for women,  
minority and LGBTQ+  
Veterans**



Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion in everything we do in VA. Ensuring providers are racially and ethnically diverse and trained in delivering culturally competent care

- White ribbon, anti-harassment and anti-sexual assault campaigns
- Connections through specialized care coordinators for minority, women and LGBTQ+ Veterans, plus screening for and addressing health-related social risks
- Veteran, caregiver and family member diversity, equity and inclusion feedback sessions

**Modernize our facilities  
into the future**



Developing technologies, systems solutions and best practices that reinforce VA as a 21st Century health care system. Ensuring our facilities, equipment and systems support providing the highest quality care

- Promote healing environments that support Veterans, caregivers and family members
- Optimize space for complementary and integrative health approaches that support health and well-being for Veterans and employees

**Collaborate with VSOs,  
tribes, states, advocates  
and agencies**



Leveraging stakeholder expertise through strategic engagement of VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and other agencies

- Expand access to Whole Health for Veterans transitioning from active duty
- Promote interagency collaboration and partnerships

# PREVENT VETERAN SUICIDE

## VHA PRIORITY

### USH INTRO

Every Veteran suicide is a tragedy. Many Veterans have experienced first-hand the immeasurable pain suicide causes others. Our top clinical priority is preventing Veteran suicide and that will require a full public health approach, combining community and clinical-based interventions. The National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide, clinical practice guidelines for VA and Department of Defense (DoD) and the White House Strategy on Reducing Military and Veteran Suicide provide the foundation for VA's suicide prevention initiatives including Suicide Prevention (SP) 2.0 and SP Now. We are calling on all partners, stakeholders and communities to help us reach Veterans and reduce Veteran suicide. We will never give up the fight to combat Veteran suicide, but we cannot win this fight alone.

### SUICIDE PREVENTION: OUR TOP CLINICAL PRIORITY

- Suicide is a complex problem, with no single cause or solution. Addressing suicide requires a comprehensive approach that focuses on community and clinical interventions beyond individual care that focuses exclusively on mental health
- Despite decreases in Veteran suicide from 2018-2020, Veterans continue to be at higher risk for suicide than non-Veterans

### ADVANCING OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- VA expanded suicide prevention efforts to 49 states and 5 territories through the State Governor's Challenge. VA reached over 200,000 Veterans in 29 rural communities through the *Together with Veterans* rural peer-to-peer program, and established nearly 600 suicide prevention local coalitions through Community Engagement Partnerships
- The nationwide Veterans Crisis Line transitioned to a new number in July 2022 to make it easier for a Veteran in crisis to remember: Dial 988 and Press 1
- VA offers evidence-based psychotherapies (EBP) across the U.S. to high-risk Veteran populations. Since the start of the program, there have been over 4,500 telehealth consults and over 100 mental health care providers hired

### WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN DO

- Connect Veterans to national telehealth options established by VA's Suicide Prevention Program in partnership with VA's national Clinical Resource Hub leadership team
- Participate in mandatory training, which includes candid conversations on suicide and secure storage of firearms
- Use VA's best-in-class strategies, evidence-based resources, tools and education
- Expand suicide prevention efforts outside VA to reach all Veterans



**WE WILL NEVER GIVE UP THE FIGHT TO COMBAT  
VETERAN SUICIDE AT EVERY TURN, BUT WE CANNOT  
DO IT ALONE.**

**- DR. SHEREEF ELNAHAL**



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## **BUILD UPON...**

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### **ENHANCING VETERAN ACCESS**

- The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) is the frontline of care, providing 24/7 world-class crisis services through phone, chat and text for all Veterans. These services are available for Service Members of all military branches and their loved ones
- Hannon Act and Section 201 of the COMPACT Act built upon VA's existing mental health services and will improve Veterans' access to options for emergency suicide care
- SP 2.0 Clinical Telehealth offers evidence-based psychotherapies, as outlined in the VA/DoD 2019 Clinical Practice Guideline, to Veterans with recent suicidal self-directed harm

### **ENHANCING VETERAN CARE**

- Through SP Now and informed by the latest research, VA is expanding quality care through initiatives like the Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health-Veterans Enhanced Treatment (REACH VET) program and Safety Planning in the Emergency Department (SPED)
- The Hannon Act and Section 201 of the COMPACT Act built upon VA's existing mental health services and will improve Veterans' access to emergency suicide care options
- The Isakson-Roe Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act focuses on supporting women Veterans, providing continued pandemic support and improving services for homeless Veterans. Title V of this Act, known as the Deborah Sampson Act, aims to improve the VA system of care for the nearly 2 million women Veterans nationwide, in part by bolstering women Veterans' counseling and legal services

### **MAKING PROGRESS**

- In 2020, VA reported the lowest number of Veteran suicides since 2006, with 343 fewer Veterans dying from suicide in 2020 than in 2019
- From 2018 through 2020, adjusted suicide rates for Veterans fell by 9.7%
- To date, the VCL has answered over 6.2 million calls and evaluation has shown VCL callers are significantly less likely to have suicidal urgency and distress at the end of the call compared with the beginning
- VA works with national experts to evaluate program effectiveness, responsible uses of resources and reduction of Veteran suicide



### Retain, invest in and support our people

Improving VHA's culture to further support the overall well-being of every employee

- Veterans Crisis Line 988 Hiring
- Community Engagement Program Coordinators (CEPC)
- Suicide Prevention Coordinators and overall mental health staffing



### Scale best practices and drive innovation

Forging a healthier future for Veterans and the nation. Providing world-class care while leveraging cutting-edge research

- Mission Daybreak innovation program
- Multiple Suicide Prevention Demonstration Projects
- Integrating work from VA research centers and centers of excellence to translate new research findings into practice



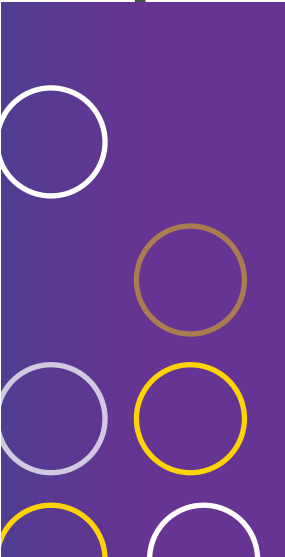
### Improve our technology systems and workflows

Building on learning from the pandemic to maintain the safe delivery of high-quality care, creating new care modalities that enhance quality while optimizing resources like virtual care

- Telehealth delivery of evidence-based treatments like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for suicide prevention
- Partnership with Office of Information Technology for full VCL technology modernization
- Implementation of measurement-based care







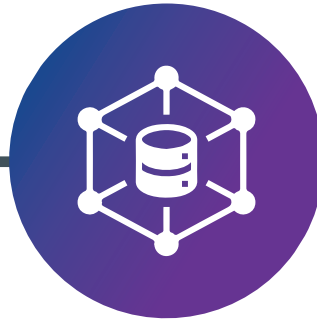
**Drive equity for women,  
minority and LGBTQ+  
Veterans**



Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion in everything we do in VA. Ensuring providers are racially and ethnically diverse and trained in delivering culturally competent care

- Advancing suicide prevention research and innovation to meet the needs of diverse Veteran populations (e.g., Asian American Pacific Islander, Native American, etc.)
- Connections through specialized care coordinators for minority, women and LGBTQ+ Veterans and DE&I managers at VA medical centers
- Equity dashboards to reduce disparities in health outcomes among Veterans

**Modernize our facilities  
into the future**



Developing technologies, systems solutions and best practices that reinforce VA as a 21st Century health care system. Ensuring our facilities, equipment and systems support providing the highest quality care

- MAMMO Act
- Virtual Health Care Services (VHCS)
- Access to Care website

**Collaborate with VSOs,  
tribes, states, advocates  
and agencies**



Leveraging stakeholder expertise through strategic engagement of VSOs, tribes, states, advocates and other agencies

- Coordinating with DoD, CDC and other federal agencies to increase data sharing to support suicide surveillance and analytics

# VHA LONG-RANGE PLAN FRAMEWORK

VA provides more care, benefits and services to more Veterans than ever before. To fulfill our most sacred obligation, our work must be aligned, integrated and synchronized across the country. VA works tirelessly to ensure we do what is right and best for Veterans.

The VA Strategic Plan principles, the VHA Long-Range Plan Framework goals and the VHA Priorities and Strategic Enablers shape our decision-making and form the basis for how we deliver timely, world-class health care and provide Veterans and their families the benefits they have earned.

## VHA LONG-RANGE PLAN FRAMEWORK

VA's Fiscal Year 2022-2028 Strategic Plan outlines four fundamental principles – **access, advocacy, outcomes** and **excellence**. To reinforce these principles, VHA created the 2022-2025 VHA Long-Range Plan Framework.

The Framework designates four goals:

Goal 1: Veterans choose VHA as their health care provider and coordinator, built on trusted, long-term relationships

Goal 2: VHA delivers high-quality, accessible and integrated health care

Goal 3: VHA maximizes performance through shared ownership and is on the forefront of innovation

Goal 4: VHA optimizes assets across the enterprise

## CONNECTING THE PIECES

The 6 VHA Priorities and Strategic Enablers are foundational to every decision we make in implementing VHA's long-range goals. Both are strategic — the 6 VHA Priorities are the focus for the upcoming one to two years, while the Long-Range Plan Framework spans the next three to four years. These share the same goal — to marshal our resources and strengthen our systems so that VA performs at its best for Veterans. Together, the VHA Priorities, Strategic Enablers and Long-Range Plan Framework will help us perform more efficiently and effectively.

These complement one another and support the work already being done to meet VHA's mission — honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.





**WE WANT TO GET EMPLOYEES AND VETERANS WHAT THEY NEED, WHERE AND WHEN THEY NEED IT.**

- DR. SHEREEF ELNAHAL



## **GOAL 1** **VETERANS CHOOSE VHA AS THEIR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER AND COORDINATOR, BUILT ON TRUSTED, LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS**

- Objectives
- Understand and employ what matters most to the Veteran and their care team
  - Increase communications that promote the use of learning tools and the understanding of available resources to Veterans, employees and stakeholders
  - Increase national recognition of VHA as a provider of high-quality health care services

## **GOAL 2** **VHA DELIVERS HIGH-QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE AND INTEGRATED HEALTH CARE**

- Objectives
- Enhance Veterans' care by building an integrated delivery network with internal and external partners
  - Provide greater choice for care across the VA system at facilities and through virtual care, community care and collaborative opportunities
  - Tailor care to serve every Veteran, ensuring equity for those who are underserved
  - Increase access to and use of a broad spectrum of services that encourage and support lifelong whole health and wellness

## **GOAL 3** **VHA MAXIMIZES PERFORMANCE THROUGH SHARED OWNERSHIP AND IS ON THE FOREFRONT OF INNOVATION**

- Objectives
- Fully transform VHA into a High Reliability Organization by deepening a culture of shared ownership, accountability, stewardship and collaboration
  - Integrate and leverage best practices and technological advances in health care into clinical practice and affiliation education
  - Promote VHA as an authoritative thought leader in health care delivery and training by conducting clinical research and providing health care-related data that benefits Veterans and the general public

## **GOAL 4** **VHA OPTIMIZES ASSETS ACROSS THE ENTERPRISE**

- Objectives
- Modernize and enhance business and health information systems and enterprise data
  - Evolve from a holding company to an operating company model
  - Optimize the use of physical resources and infrastructure modernization efforts
  - Provide comprehensive and robust human resource (HR) investments to acquire and develop diverse talent and engage employees from onboarding to retirement
  - Improve coordination, communication and transparency across VHA

# TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

**W**hen VHA is at its peak, Veterans leave our facilities feeling their best. Understanding the big picture of where VHA is going as an organization will help employees make the right decisions every day they come to work, and it will help others who support VHA in delivering exceptional care to Veterans. To all our employees and supporters who are dedicated to improving health outcomes for Veterans, please know that your efforts are valued and have a lifelong impact on Veterans.

This magazine was designed to help employees and all those who care about Veterans understand VHA's Priorities and Strategic Enablers, and how they mesh with VA's and VHA's existing Missions, Visions, Values, Strategic Plan and Long-Range Plan. But most importantly, it was designed to help everyone understand how we are going to propel the good work already done to the next level. In truth, there is so much more to say in between these pages about the great programs that VA has to offer. We encourage you to use the Resources Section below to learn more.

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## RESOURCES

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### VHA Home Page

- [www.va.gov/health](http://www.va.gov/health)
- [www.volunteer.va.gov](http://www.volunteer.va.gov)

### Hire Faster and More Competitively

- [www.vacareers.va.gov](http://www.vacareers.va.gov)

### Connect Veterans to the Soonest and Best Care

- [www.accesstocare.va.gov](http://www.accesstocare.va.gov)
- [www.connectedcare.va.gov](http://www.connectedcare.va.gov)
- [www.telehealth.va.gov](http://www.telehealth.va.gov)

### Serve Veterans with Military Environmental Exposures

- [www.va.gov/PACT](http://www.va.gov/PACT)

### Support Veterans' Whole Health, Their Caregivers and Survivors

- [www.va.gov/wholehealth](http://www.va.gov/wholehealth)
- [www.news.va.gov/category/health/livewholehealth](http://www.news.va.gov/category/health/livewholehealth)

### Prevent Veteran Suicide

- Don't Wait. Reach Out. [www.va.gov/reach](http://www.va.gov/reach)





