



# DEAN

Office of Discovery, Education  
and Affiliate Networks

# 2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Foreword

At DEAN, each training program, research study, innovation, or partnership reflects our commitment to meeting Veterans where they are. Veterans' health and well-being is our "North Star."

As a metaphor underscoring this resolve, the uplifted hands shown on the cover support the unique world of Veterans' health care and the diverse Veteran population we are privileged to serve. The interconnected lines and profiles across the sphere represent the tools, talents, and teams you'll be reading about in this report - all of it framed by the bright teal sky and rising amber sun.

DEAN's 2022 Year in Review tells a compelling story of how DEAN, per its mission statement, continues to transform health care for Veterans and the Nation through training, research, innovation, and partnerships. Over the past 12 months, we initiated new pilots, such as a geriatric nurse residency program and value-based framework for innovation, and launched new annual events, including Health Professions Education Week and the SimLEARN Immersive Technology Summit. The centerpiece of the Immersive Technology Summit was hearing directly from Veterans using these technologies for pain management, mental health and so much more.

We also launched a new practice-based research network on Long COVID and strengthened our relationships with Veterans by working with Veterans and our employees to reimagine health care and by forming new national and community partnerships.

Throughout it all, DEAN continued its foundational role of promoting VHA as a learning health care system. In 2022, that role was heightened by our many efforts to meet Veterans where they are and work to disseminate lessons learned. Our special section on this topic provides a snapshot of the many ways we partnered internally, externally, and with Veterans themselves to expand access, better understand their experience of health care, and be there when they need us most.

Finally, in 2022, we welcomed Dr. Susan Kirsh as Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Health for DEAN. As both an internist and physician leader, Dr. Kirsh brings to DEAN a wealth of experience from the field and an outstanding track record leading major VHA programs in primary care, specialty care, and access.

I am incredibly proud of the work DEAN produced this year and its impact on health care for Veterans and the Nation.



## Carolyn M. Clancy, MD

Assistant Undersecretary for Health  
Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks  
Veterans Health Administration

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VHA

DEAN



**OAA**

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFILIATIONS



**ORD**

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT



**OHIL**

OFFICE OF HEALTHCARE INNOVATION AND LEARNING

**CCPI**

CENTER FOR CARE AND PAYMENT INNOVATION

**SimLEARN**

SIMULATION LEARNING, EVALUATION, ASSESSMENT, AND RESEARCH NETWORK

**VHA IE**

VHA INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM



**HAP**

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTHCARE ADVANCEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

# About DEAN

## Transforming health care for Veterans and the Nation through innovation, training, research, and partnerships.

This is DEAN's mission. Both collectively and individually, DEAN offices proactively address some of health care's most challenging issues, leaving an indelible impression on VHA, as well as non-VHA health care.

This work is accomplished through DEAN's affiliated program offices:



The Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA), which trains the next generation of health care providers through its extensive graduate medical education programs.



The Office of Research and Development's (ORD) 95-year-old research program, which is embedded as part of the Nation's single largest health care system.



The Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning (OHIL), which improves existing processes and rapidly disseminates learning through the Center for Care and Payment Innovation (CCPI), Simulation Learning, Evaluation, Assessment, and Research Network (SimLEARN), and the VHA Innovation Ecosystem (VHA IE).



The National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP), which expands and strengthens collaboration with national and local organizations.

Together, these offices promote a culture of shared learning across the VHA enterprise that empowers all personnel to discover and advance the best health care solutions.

# 2022 PROGRAM OFFICE HIGHLIGHTS



Our Nation has many obligations, but it only has one truly sacred obligation. That's to prepare and equip those we send into harm's way and to care for them and their families when they come home. It's a sacred obligation. Because Veterans are the backbone, the spine, of who we are as a country.

**President Joe Biden**





## Enhancing the VA Health Care Workforce Pipeline

Building a diverse HPT population that reflects the Veterans served leads to better health outcomes. That is why OAA continues to focus on expanding VA affiliations with Minority Serving Institutions (MSI). Currently, 29% of OAA programs are affiliated with MSIs, representing 62% of Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, 57% of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), 34% of Hispanic Serving Institutions, and 20% of Predominantly Black Institutions that offer HPE programs. This year, OAA debuted its interactive geo-map that provides location and affiliation data for MSIs and VA facilities. This move aims to help address VA staffing shortage areas to meet VA's future health care needs, with a focus on high-priority health professions. OAA also consulted with VA medical facilities that have a concentration of potential MSI affiliations to assist with developing partnerships to expand VA/MSI relationships and share best practices for increasing diversity in HPE.

## VA Celebrates Inaugural Health Professions Education Week

VA celebrated its inaugural Health Professions Education Week March 14-18, 2022, recognizing the contributions of more than 118,000 health professions trainees who train and care for the Nation's Veterans in over 150 VAMCs. This week signifies the tremendous value of VA's education mission for Veterans, academic institutions, health professions trainees, and the Nation's health care system.

### Doctors Caucus Meets With OAA

On January 26, members of the GOP Congressional Doctors Caucus discussed how VA academic affiliations and training programs enhance Veteran care and HPE. Caucus members heard from a panel of accomplished trainees and VA educators about the high-quality training programs shaping their skills. The host, Rep. Buddy Carter (GA-1), congratulated Secretary McDonough and VA on the establishment of VA Health Professions Education Week. "This is extremely important for us to make sure that we've got health care professionals who are going to be able to serve our country and our citizens in the future," he said.

# OAA OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFILIATIONS

In partnership with over 1,400 academic institutions, including 96% of U.S. medical schools and 150 VA Medical Centers (VAMCs), VA conducts the Nation's largest education and training program for students and residents across 1,000 VA sites of care. Overseen by OAA, VA provides health professions education (HPE) to 118,000+ health professions trainees (HPTs) across 60+ disciplines each year. VA's HPE mission ensures a pipeline of health care professionals will be ready to address the complex clinical needs of Veterans and Americans in the ever-changing health care landscape.



Working together, VA and its academic partners have consistently led the way in providing the highest caliber of training from world-class faculty to our Nation's future health professionals for more than 75 years. Our interdisciplinary environment and commitment to teaching evidence-based medicine from a comprehensive coordinated care approach are what make VA's education program so valuable for Veterans and the country.

**Marjorie A. Bowman, MD, MPA**  
Chief Academic Affiliations Officer



Of all physicians in the U.S. completed training in VA

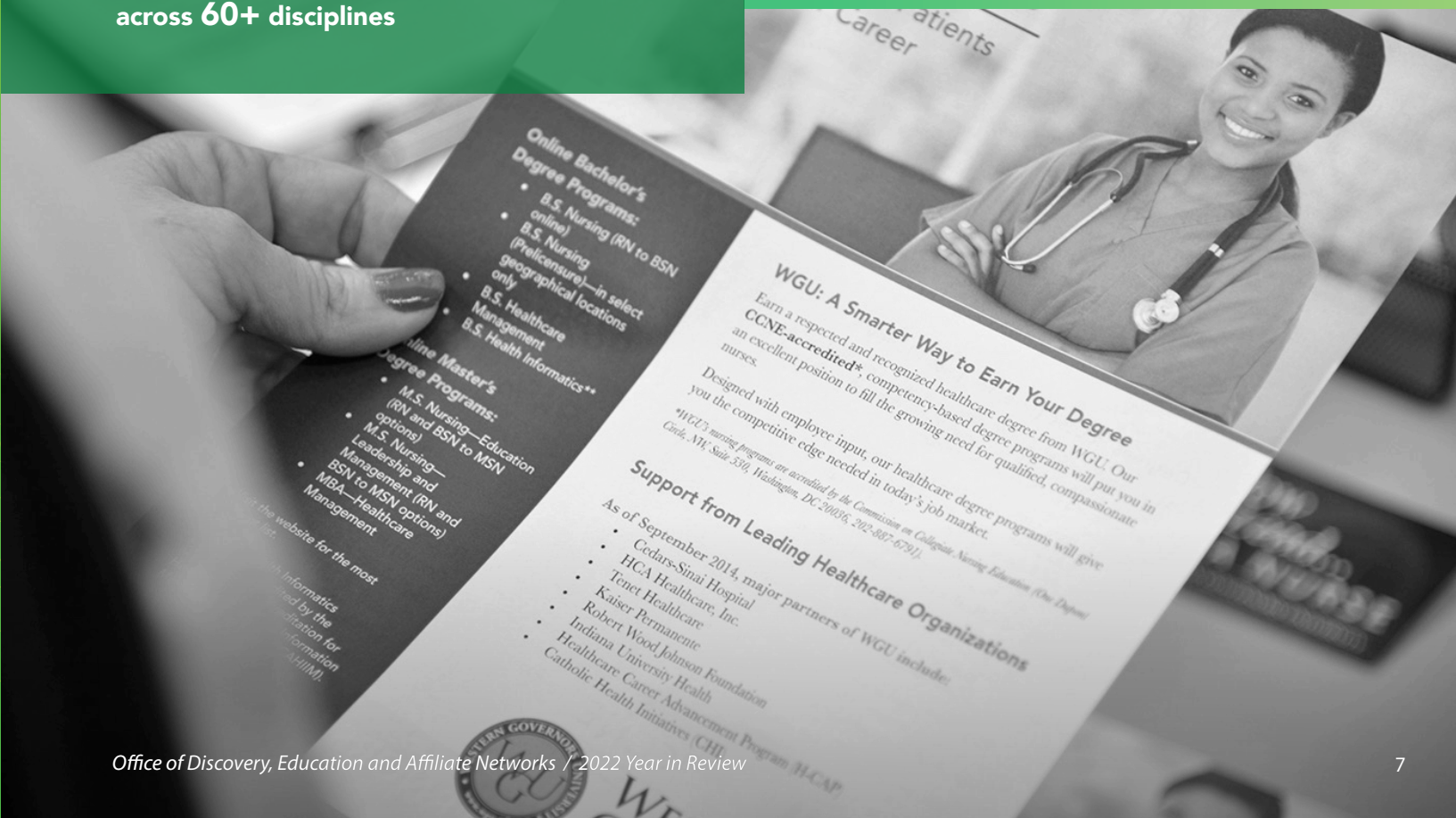


Nursing students train in VA each year

**118K** HPT participants

in **7K+** training programs

across **60+** disciplines





## Expanding Graduate Medical Education

In 2022, OAA met the requirements of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act (VACAA) of 2014, which expanded graduate medical education (GME) by establishing 1,500 new GME positions to improve access to primary care, mental health and other specialties for Veterans in underserved areas.

The VACAA program provided grants to establish new affiliations, develop educational infrastructure and fund new resident positions by 2024. VA met the VACAA GME expansion goal two years ahead of schedule, improving access to care and expanding medical resident training positions to meet Veterans' needs. Of the 1,500 residency slots, 66% were in primary care or mental health.



I started out as a pre-doctorate intern in VA. I did my trauma rotation and found I love the dynamic at the VA. When I went into my advanced fellowship, one of my mentors offered the opportunity to train in virtual reality which is an enhancement to prolonged exposure therapy. It really showed my supervisor was listening. The team here really cares about what you're doing and where you want to go as a provider.

**Christopher Holland-DeGuire, PsyD**  
North Texas VA Healthcare System

**\$1B**

The amount of funds invested by VA annually to train future health professionals for VA and the Nation

## 2022 Training Numbers

**600+**

Advanced Fellows

**22K+**

Associated Health Trainees

**77.7K**

Graduate Medical Education Trainees

**17.8K**

Nursing Trainees

**170+**

Other Trainees

**118K Health Professions Trainees**



VA Research is committed to enhancing the research enterprise, which is defined by the people, tools, and processes that promote a holistic VA approach to improving Veteran health and well-being through scientific endeavors.

**Rachel B. Ramoni, DMD, ScD**  
Chief Research and Development Officer



# ORD

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Through ORD, VA covers the full gamut of health research, from basic sciences like biomedical laboratory studies to clinical trials, data analyses, and studies of how health care is delivered and how it can be improved. As an integrated health care system, VA is uniquely positioned to quickly translate research findings into everyday practice and care for Veterans.

## VA-Academic Research Collaboration Improves Veterans' Lives

For more than 75 years, VA's collaboration with medical schools has generated pioneering breakthroughs in science and medicine, and far-reaching health care advancements for Veterans and the Nation. In 2022, DEAN celebrated this enduring collaboration by publishing a new brochure showcasing selected achievements spanning biomedical, clinical, health services, and rehabilitation research and development.

- Longstanding Collaboratives
- Cancer Research
- Women's Health
- Signature Injuries of Recent Conflicts
- Centers of Excellence and Innovation
- Future Health Care Needs of Veterans and the Nation



## COVID-19 RESEARCH

### VA Research Identifies Long-Term Risks

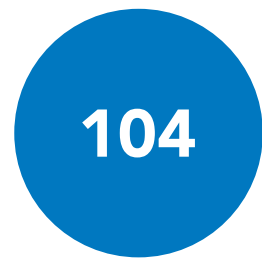
Veterans with COVID-19 may experience long-term cardiovascular and mental health effects, according to studies led by Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly at the VA St. Louis Healthcare System in Missouri. His team found increased risks for serious conditions such as heart attack, heart failure, blood clots, and stroke following COVID-19 infection. Veterans with COVID-19 were 55% more likely to suffer a

major adverse cardiovascular event. In another study, Dr. Al-Aly's team examined nearly 154,000 people after they had received a COVID-19 infection. They found patients had a 60% elevated risk for a mental health condition 30 days after COVID-19 infection. Mental health conditions observed included anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, opioid use, and substance use disorders.

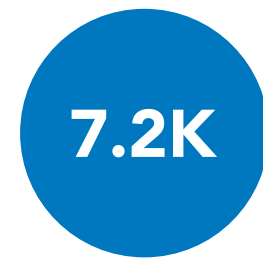
### Integrating Research and Clinical Care

As part of VA's efforts in 2022 to develop a consistent care program for all Long COVID patients, ORD established the Long COVID Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN). PBRNs involve practicing clinicians asking and answering clinical

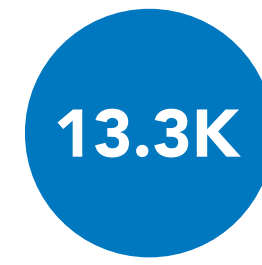
and organizational questions about primary health care. Through care of Long COVID patients, this multi-site collaboration between researchers and clinicians will facilitate real-time learning as well as support research to benefit patients in VA facilities.



Active research sites nationwide



Actively funded research projects (VA funding and other sources)



Published research articles authored or co-authored by VA investigators



Total research budget (including VA and other sources)



Total congressional appropriation for VA medical and prosthetic research



“ I find a common bond with Veteran patients that is different from the normal doctor-patient relationship. When they find out I’m a Navy captain, we’re brothers in about five minutes.

**Thomas Dresser, PhD**  
*Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans’ Hospital*



### Scott Hannon Initiative for Precision Mental Health

To prevent Veteran suicide and promote mental health, ORD and the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) launched an initiative in 2022 to identify mental health biomarkers in Veterans. The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Improvement Act (Hannon Act) strives to advance mental health research in VA. To that end, ORD is leveraging several ongoing studies, like the Million Veteran Program and Measures Investigating Neuropsychiatric Disorders, to use precision medicine to tailor disease prevention and treatment for Veterans with mental health disorders.

### Genetic Testing May Benefit Patients with Depression

In 2022, a team led by VA researchers at the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC in Philadelphia conducted a clinical trial of nearly 2,000 Veterans with major depressive disorder from 22 VAMCs. The Precision Medicine in Mental Health Care (PRIME Care) trial found that pharmacogenomic testing can help providers avoid prescribing antidepressant medications that may have undesirable drug-gene interactions. Over 24 weeks of treatment, the group with genetic testing had a drop in depression symptoms compared to those without genetic testing.

### The NAI BRAIN Summit 2022

The Brain Health & Rehabilitation through Artificial Intelligence Network (BRAIN) Summit was held September 7-9, 2022. Hosted by the National Artificial Intelligence Institute (NAII), the summit brought together Artificial Intelligence (AI) researchers, clinicians, and thought leaders in government and the private sector to network and discuss the use of AI to improve brain health and rehabilitation. A key goal was to highlight AI’s impact on Veterans’ health in the areas of brain cancer, brain injury and rehabilitation, and mental health.



### VAIRSS Supports Research Management

Today, thanks to the VA Innovation and Research Review System (VAIRRS), all VA staff can instantly access any research study. Since its introduction in 2020, all VAMCs with research programs across the U.S. have adopted the new system, which provides an enterprise cloud-based platform to support the management of research oversight committees. In the last year, the platform has expanded by 20%, attracting over 33,000 users and increasing system use by 45%, with more than 637,000 submitted research documents into the portal.



“ Improving life for Veterans is one of the cornerstones of my research program. I hope to dedicate the next few decades of my life to the health and well-being of Veterans with neurological conditions.

**John Kindred, PhD**  
*Ralph H. Johnson  
 VA Health Care System*





**CCPI**

**CENTER FOR CARE AND  
PAYMENT INNOVATION**

**OHIL**

**OFFICE OF HEALTHCARE  
INNOVATION AND LEARNING**

*OHIL brings together three programs to deliver on VHA's mission to innovate: the Center for Care and Payment Innovation (CCPI), the Simulation Learning, Evaluation, Assessment, and Research Network (SimLEARN), and the VHA Innovation Ecosystem (VHA IE). Through these core programs, OHIL advances health care delivery and service and cements VHA as a learning organization and global leader in health care innovation. Together, these offices provide innovative solutions that change and save Veteran lives.*

**Advanced Manufacturing: Ensuring Equitable Access, Enhancing Veteran Care**

By investing in advanced manufacturing, OHIL is taking product designs that address Veterans' needs from brainstorm to bedside. Three VAMCs operate as the Office of Advanced Manufacturing (OAM) Hub Labs to develop, test, and manufacture new products, devices, and processes. OAM Hub Labs can repeatably create safe and effective medical devices, ensuring equitable access to

care across VA. Two OAM Hub Labs are registered with the FDA as medical device developers and manufacturers, allowing for in-house production of FDA-regulated products. This year, OAM produced the VHA Thermal Fuse Cover, addressing a need raised by the National Center for Patient Safety for a home oxygen delivery system safety device that prevents burns and fires.

*CCPI collaborates across government and industry to design, evaluate, and scale innovative payment and service delivery approaches to enhance the quality of care for Veterans and drive value throughout the Department.*

**Value-Based Framework Designed to Deliver Impact**

CCPI has a single, unifying objective: transform VA into an integrated, value-based health care system that reduces administrative burdens and optimizes care delivery resources. To achieve this, CCPI leverages the OHIL Value-Driven Framework. This framework guides CCPI to develop solutions based on four dynamic measures – access, effectiveness, efficiency, and equity – and three fundamental principles – meaningfulness, appropriateness of scale, and time to value realization. Application of the evaluation framework provides a formalized, repeatable approach to innovation that allows

the program to implement pilot programs in collaboration with partners across VA, government, and industry. Areas of focus include implementing solutions that facilitate cross-Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISNs) resource sharing and collaborations, delivering care to Veterans in the home, and integrating virtual technologies into existing care pathways. Using the evaluation framework as its guiding light, CCPI is addressing key Veteran priorities and advancing VA as a fully realized value-based health care system.





# SIMLEARN

SIMULATION LEARNING,  
EVALUATION, ASSESSMENT,  
AND RESEARCH NETWORK

SimLEARN provides world-class innovation and simulation education to those delivering health care to Veterans. SimLEARN uses five portfolios of programs and tools to improve Veteran well-being in a safe learning environment: Learning Management (LM); Assessment, Collaboration, and Outreach (ACO); Clinical Training and Engagement (CTE); Resuscitation Education and Innovation (REI); and Simulation Validation, Evaluation, and Testing (SimVET) Integrations, formerly Emerging Healthcare Technology Integration (EHTI).

## Safeguarding Health Care Solutions

The Simulation Validation, Evaluation, and Testing (SimVET) model produces Consumer Report style analysis with relevant comparisons and end-user recommendations that allow decision-makers to make the most informed choices possible when it comes to Veteran care. It is a powerful ally for VHA as it

continues its journey to a high reliability organization (HRO) and for front-line staff who bring their knowledge and experience to this process. By evaluating emerging health care solutions in a realistic, simulated environment, SimVET ensures these solutions are safe and effective for Veterans who receive treatment at VAMCs.

2.8K

Attendees in **217** courses and events

1.6K

Participants in **123** face-to-face and training events

155

Participants in **36** tours of the National Simulation Center

**248.2K** participants in **668** courses delivered in-person in the Resuscitation Education and Innovations (REI) portfolio of courses

## VA Summer Immersive Summit

In June, OHIL hosted the first VA Summer Immersive Summit in Orlando, FL. The three-day event highlighted VA's use of immersive technology to define a new reality for Veterans, clinicians, facilities, and health care. The summit focused on preparing clinical staff to deploy emerging technologies and transformational care models. Government, academic, and industry leaders showcased the role of extended reality (XR) in providing cutting-edge care to Veterans. One of the Summit's highlights was a panel of Veterans discussing how XR has changed, and even saved, their lives. "I would encourage other Veterans to try it," said Veteran Rudy Medina, who participated in the panel. "Going through the things we do as Veterans... especially those of us who have gone through drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and mental health issues – it takes you out of yourself." Nearly 130 individuals attended the event in-person daily, in addition to 200 virtual stream watchers.



## Advancing Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) Simulation Support

On a daily basis, SimLEARN collaborates with national program offices and local VAMCs to support clinical, end-to-end workflow optimization and supported end-user experience. In 2022, SimLEARN also facilitated several improvements that resulted in safety enhancements before recent Cerner deployments. SimLEARN continues to work collaboratively with VHA, VAMC, and EHRM leaders to provide process simulation and real-world, team-based clinical workflow and device validation to this critical need for VA. By leveraging the on-site capabilities of the National SimVET Center and the field-based capabilities of VHA staff and partners, SimLEARN provides a seamless and paperless transition for Veterans as they transition from receiving care at DOD while on active duty to receiving care at VA facilities.



Immersive technology is at the forefront of health care innovation, changing the reality of how we will deliver and experience care across medical disciplines.

**Eric Bruns**  
Executive Director, SimLEARN



VA Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal (left), was briefed on SimLEARN's programs during a tour of the National SimVET Center in Orlando, Florida.



# VHA IE

VHA INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

VHA IE empowers frontline employees and leverages the collective power of external partners from academia, industry, non-profits, and other government agencies to facilitate mission-driven, health care innovation.

## Developing New Suicide Prevention Strategies

Suicide prevention is a VA top priority and major public health issue. VA's whole-government and patient-centered approach to Veteran suicide has involved a broad network of government, industry, and academic partners. One of these efforts, Mission Daybreak, invites Veterans, Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), and external partners (e.g., community-based organizations, health tech companies, startups, and universities) to submit innovative concepts to reduce suicide. In Summer 2022, Mission Daybreak received over 1,300 concept submissions during the first phase of the challenge. The second phase is underway, with the top 30 concept papers selected

to move forward to further refine their ideas. In this phase, finalists can join a virtual accelerator program designed to help the teams develop roadmaps for prototyping, iteration, testing, and evaluation. Mission Daybreak is one of the many examples of how VA has harnessed the power of partnerships to prevent Veteran suicide.



To end Veteran suicide, we need to use every tool available. [...] That's why Mission Daybreak is fostering solutions across a broad spectrum of focus areas to combat this preventable problem.

**Denis McDonough**  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

## Expanding the Extended Reality Network

In 2022, the VHA XR Network continued to promote the benefits of immersive technology and expand its usage across VA and the broader health care community. XR is an umbrella term for virtual, augmented, and mixed-reality technology that offers Veterans an engaging, non-pharmaceutical approach for a host of acute and chronic conditions in a virtual environment to teach new skills, provide objective assessments, guide rehabilitation, and improve overall health and wellness.

As of August 2022, the VHA XR Network engages and supports:



VHA staff members



VA facilities

This technology increases Veteran access to care because it expands VA's ability to provide care both at home and across VAMCs and outpatient clinics. The numbers speak to the program's success and impact: the XR Network grew from two multi-site pilots in 2021, upon its launch, to six more in development by the end of 2022.

Facilities are also using XR in novel ways to care for Veterans:

15 sites have BraveMind, a therapy program for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with 4 additional sites coming soon

56 sites use WayaHealth for Creative Arts Therapy, with 17 more sites currently onboarding

18 sites have Penumbra's REAL Y-series for physical rehabilitation

11 sites using a variety of platforms for employee wellness

## Boosting Innovation Through Pathfinder

Launched in 2022, Pathfinder streamlines how to do business with VA by serving as a virtual concierge to innovators and prospective vendors. By bringing all necessary steps together in one site, vendors can more readily obtain needed information on VA contracting, innovation, and collaboration, and directly submit their solutions for VA review, as well as market research. Innovators come from industry, VSOs, nonprofits and community groups, academia, other government agencies, and individuals. Since the launch, more than 100 innovation and vendor submissions have been received by VA.



Office of Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks / 2022 Year in Review



Having access to a personalized, step-by-step guide to collaborating with VA is a game changer. It eliminates the challenges of finding the right person in the right program office, and it helps collaborators and customers feel more engaged with innovation at VA.

**Suzanne Shirley, LCSW**  
Director of Community Engagement & Fellowships VHA IE



Innovators



External vendors

Used the Pathfinder database within the first 100 days of launch



# HAP

## NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTHCARE ADVANCEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

*HAP serves as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community levels, as well as advances the health and well-being of Veterans through the exploration of innovative, safe, and ethical emerging therapies.*

23

Active partnerships managed and facilitated by HAP

Collectively, HAP partnerships addressed the following Social Determinants of Health (SDOH):

- ▶ Housing
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Employment
- ▶ Food Security
- ▶ Health Care
- ▶ Safety
- ▶ Mental Health



In 2022, HAP's unique role in forging and sustaining community partnerships was more important than ever. With our Nation still confronting COVID-19 and our Veterans facing the rising costs of inflation, HAP increased its efforts to help VHA continue delivering superior care.

**Tracy L. Weistreich, PhD**  
RN Nurse Executive, HAP



## Americans for the Arts

This partnership brings community arts, humanities organizations and VHA Whole Health programs together to provide Veterans, their families, and caregivers with opportunities to experience how art positively impacts their health and well-being. This year, HAP led a presentation on partnership development for representatives from community arts and humanities organizations and VHA Whole Health programs. The presentation was attended by 10 community partners, and 17 VAMC teams of individuals from 11 VISNs.



## Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation

The goal of this Texas-based partnership is to create more hiring opportunities for Veterans, transitioning service members, and spouses by facilitating job fairs, educating community employers about VA resources, and improving Veteran health literacy. This year, this collaborative effort resulted in multiple career fairs and hiring events with companies like Service King, 7-Eleven, SYSCO, Kraft Heinz, and PrimeSource, including resume-writing and interviewing workshops.



## Salesforce

VHA and the Salesforce Military community work together to support the career goals of Veterans, service members, and their spouses in the civilian workforce, through access to skill development, career advancement, and employment resources. Salesforce Military has also developed online guides on VA benefits and mental health resiliency resources, including suicide prevention. In 2022, this partnership supported more than 45,000 Veterans and their families. VHA helped connect 1,900 Veterans and eligible enrollees to Salesforce Military's free resources. Trailhead learning platform, a gamified learning experience for those interested in developing a career in technology, generated new, free learning modules which were accessed by more than 4,000 Veterans.



## Parkinson's Foundation

More than 110,000 Veterans with Parkinson's disease receive care through VA. Getting them information about their condition is key. By increasing their access and helping them navigate VHA services and resources, this collaboration improves Veterans' health, well-being, and quality of life. In 2022, HAP created numerous resources and channels for distributing that information, from a new protocol that helps VA health professionals use a Foundation helpline to order patient materials in bulk for Veterans and their families and sponsor two national and five regional events. Combined with ongoing efforts, such as its quarterly newsletter, HAP reached more than 2,355 Veterans and caregivers.



# VHA NATIONAL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGE (CPC)

CPC highlights successful nonmonetary partnerships that help meet Veterans' needs, while celebrating the creativity, passion, and commitment of VHA employees and the leaders who support them. The Challenge begins with a theme that captures the unique challenges facing Veterans and incorporates the mission, vision, and values of the VA and VHA. Criteria for selection include foundational core values (integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence) and fundamental beliefs about rights (inclusion, diversity, equity, and access) in

alignment with VHA organizational priorities and principles. This year's theme was G.R.O.W., which stands for "Goal oriented, Resiliency, Opportunity, Wellness." VHA employees were asked to submit entries for partnerships that exemplify a goal-oriented approach to collaborations, build resiliency across SDOH, create opportunities to increase access to care or services through an innovative approach, and improve the well-being of Veterans. The staff reviewed approximately 50 entries to choose the three winners for 2022:

## Veteran Sponsor Partnership Network (VSPN)

The VSPN initiative is focused on improving the experience and outcomes of military service members transitioning into civilian life. This goal includes reducing risk factors related to Veteran suicide, which is significantly elevated for Veterans in their first year after leaving the military. Based on the DOD military sponsor program, VSPN follows an evidence-based approach to help Veterans achieve better outcomes across SDOH after the military transition to civilian status. Through this initiative, all 18 VISNs and more than 18 community partners form non-monetary partnerships to help transitioning service members and their families access VA services and community resources, including housing assistance, transportation, employment opportunities, and more. HAP facilitates the development and formalization of agreements between VISNs and local, regional, and nationwide community partners.



## CPC 2022 Winners

### Michael J. Crescenz VAMC/Heroic Gardens

Through virtual gardening workshops and community-based nature walking meditation groups, the Philadelphia VAMC teamed up with Heroic Gardens, whose mission is to "help Veterans experience the healing power of nature."

### Robert J. Dole VAMC/Wichita Animal Action League

With many Veterans foregoing needed inpatient care for worry of losing their pets, the Wichita VAMC joined with the local Animal Action League to provide a support system for pet care.

### VA Boston Healthcare System/Veterans Voice Radio Network

The Boston-based radio network collaborated with the local VA Healthcare System to broadcast and market critical health care information, such as suicide prevention resources, to military service members, Veterans, and their families, at no cost.

**NEXT YEAR'S THEME: ACCELERATING VHA'S JOURNEY TO HIGH RELIABILITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS**



In September, Georgi Bady, Project Lead for CPC, and Dr. Tracy Weistreich from HAP were interviewed on C20, the live, interactive talk show hosted by Dr. Chad Kessler bi-weekly. They talked about how VA leverages community partnerships to augment VA services; best practices that emerged from this year's national CPC; and how these innovative ideas could be spread across VA.

425+

Veterans served  
(40%+ increase from  
the year before)

585+

Sponsors and  
community partner  
sponsors trained by VHA

# MEETING VETERANS WHERE THEY ARE



We must continue listening to and engaging Veterans and care teams to uncover insights beyond traditional health care constructs.

**Dr. Ryan Vega**  
Chief Officer, OHIL

# MEETING VETERANS WHERE THEY ARE

Veterans' health care is first and foremost about Veterans. *Meeting Veterans where they are* not only means transcending the physical boundaries of location and distance, but better understanding Veterans' experiences of health and health care - regardless of age, ethnicity, technological skills, or other factors. Through its myriad programs, DEAN seeks to appreciate the wide spectrum of health care needs from the Veteran's point of view, from developing, scaling, and replicating innovations nationwide to reimagining their health care, expanding access to care, ensuring health equity, improving pain management, supporting them as they age, and above all, being there whenever they need us.

**IN 2022, DEAN PROGRAM OFFICES PARTNERED WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, VETERANS THEMSELVES TO...**

## ...REIMAGINE HEALTH CARE

*Putting the Veteran first means taking the time to learn more about their perceptions and experiences, which is why DEAN interviewed over 250 Veterans and employees and launched a new campaign to transform health care.*

### Reimagining Veteran Healthcare (RVH)

VHA explored opportunities for true, lasting health care transformation for Veterans through the RVH human-centered design project. Health care is about people taking care of people. Putting Veterans at the center of its work, with their point of view in mind, RVH learned three key future opportunities for improvement: 1) VHA must redefine the initial patient encounter by making it less reactive and more proactive; 2) VHA needs to enhance customer and employee experience by shifting to personalized systems and tools; and 3)

VHA must extend the envelope of care to include upstream prevention services available beyond traditional brick-and-mortar settings. In response, RVH codesigned 11 solution concepts and is currently testing one (Care Cadre) with a small pilot to provide Veterans with companionship and help with daily tasks when and where they want it. Through RVH, DEAN will continue to create meaningful engagement and envision what VA health care will look like in 2030 and beyond.

## ...CONNECT VETERANS TO THE SOONEST AND BEST CARE

*Whether it's using telehealth to connect Veterans with providers, providing them transportation to appointments, or empowering them with resources for homecare, DEAN programs support VA's efforts to expand Veterans' access to care.*

### Providing Home-Based Health Care Innovations

When it comes to health care, there's no place like home. DEAN offices are expanding access by empowering Veterans to self-administer certain types of care, sparing them time and travel to a local facility. For example, through its virtual physical therapy program, VHA IE is making it possible for Veterans undergoing rehabilitation to safely do their exercises wherever, and whenever they need it, using a portable barre.

Similarly, Veterans needing eyedrops who also manage conditions such as tremors, Parkinson's disease, or arthritis, now have a way to overcome the challenges of using conventional eyedrop bottles. Terri Ohlinger, a nurse and case manager at the Cincinnati VAMC, worked with ORD's Technology Transfer Program to develop "DropEase," an innovation that helps Veterans safely and effectively administer drops on their own.

In the future, Veterans may soon be able to complete routine lab tests at home. Through a pilot project, CCPI is identifying specific conditions to study and is working with stakeholders nationwide to assess its potential impact, such as better patient compliance with routine testing (and therefore better management of chronic disease). CCPI is also studying how home testing may affect VA lab staffing levels, community care costs, and Veteran satisfaction.

### Providing Transportation Assistance

Launched at the Boston VAMC in 2018, Rideshare was created to help homeless Veterans get to job interviews, medical appointments and find housing opportunities. During COVID, the program pivoted to support transporting food to Veterans and transitioning immune-compromised Veterans to safe housing. Today, Rideshare is a national program celebrating its 200,000-ride milestone while providing an average of 2,000 daily rides. The program provides Veterans with transportation to interviews, employment, appointments, housing, and food resources, demonstrating VA's commitment to meeting Veterans where they are.



**Reliable transportation translates to life-altering access to housing, medical appointments, employment, food, and community services. This program allows transportation to evolve around Veterans' treatment plans, rather than making treatment plans evolve around transportation availability.**

**Charles Franklin**

*Rideshare Founder, Innovation Project Manager  
New England Center for Innovation Excellence (NECIE)*

# MEETING VETERANS WHERE THEY ARE TO...

## ...HELP THEM BETTER MANAGE PAIN

Imagine pain so debilitating you can't sleep or complete daily tasks. By better understanding how Veterans experience acute and chronic pain, VHA can help them manage it.

### Introducing eXpeRience

OHIL's experts found that Veterans with acute and chronic pain, who used extended reality (XR), virtual reality (VR), simulation, and immersive technology, experienced less pain. These technologies were showcased at this year's first-ever Veteran eXpeRience (VXR) at the National SimVET Center in Orlando, Florida. Guided by VA staff who are leaders in XR and immersive technology, 40 Veterans had the opportunity to use VR headsets to test a wide variety of immersive experiences throughout the day.

“ People get so involved in this VR activity - I want to call it a game - but they don't realize that it's almost like therapy, and they completely forget their pain.

**Gilberto Vallejo**  
U.S. Army Veteran



At Western North Carolina VA HCS, 450+ sessions have been completed using XR as a distraction tool to help decrease pain, stress, anxiety, boredom, and restless behaviors while promoting relaxation.

**66%** of Veterans with acute and chronic pain saw a drop in pain intensity

**100%** of Veterans using XR to aid with behavioral concerns felt a decrease in restlessness

**93%** of Veterans using XR exhibited overall improved behaviors



### Creating New Care Delivery Models

VA continues to research solutions for evidence-based opioid use disorder and pain treatments for Veterans. The Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI), under ORD, in partnership with OMHSP and the Pain Management, Opioid Safety, and Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, helped with the national implementation and rigorous evaluation of Stepped Care for Opioid Use Disorder Treatment, Stratification Tool for Opioid Risk Mitigation medication safety dashboard, and virtual CBT therapy for pain management.

## ...PROMOTE HEALTH EQUITY

Going to where Veterans are means the delivery of equitable, connected care that works to eliminate avoidable health disparities and address social determinants of health (SDOH) and wellness.

### Addressing Gaps Through Partnerships

By promoting inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (I-DEA) in every partnership, HAP supports positive SDOH, which are the conditions where people live, learn, work, and play that affect health and quality-of-life outcomes. These partnerships address food insecurity, homelessness, unemployment, and other SDOH that disproportionately impact minority and underserved populations.

Partnerships also address health care education needs about concerns, such as kidney disease, diabetes, heart disease, and others, that disproportionately impact diverse populations. National partnerships support implementation in local communities and enhance equity and access because they serve as force multipliers in the communities where Veterans live.

- VA's partnership with American Kidney Fund (AKF) ensures all Veterans have equitable treatment and access to quality health care. This partnership increases screening, awareness, and treatment options for those at risk for kidney disease, which disproportionately impacts Veterans of color.
- HAP's partnership with The Daniel and Salvador Montoya Heroes Foundation creates more hiring opportunities for Veterans, transitioning service members, and spouses by facilitating job fairs, educating community employers about VA resources, and improving Veteran health literacy. In 2022, this collaborative effort resulted in multiple career fairs and hiring events with private-sector companies, including resume writing and interviewing workshops.

### Overcoming Cultural Barriers through Workforce Diversity

Through academic affiliations with MSIs and fellowship programs that attract aspiring health care providers from different backgrounds, OAA fosters a diverse, rich workforce that can bridge access to care for minority populations. Dr. Ana Alfaro, a psychologist and fellow in the OAA Health and Aging Policy Fellows Program, brings to VA her firsthand experience with cultural barriers in health care. She grew up in the predominately Spanish-speaking and older community of Hialeah, Florida, where mental health was not commonly discussed. Dr. Alfaro witnessed how underserved this population was and how few resources were available. Her background shaped her perspective as a fellow working at the Palo Alto VAMC. Determined to improve access for all Veterans, Dr. Alfaro advocates for policy changes that impact the lives of people in her community who don't often get the attention they need.



## ...SUPPORT THEM AS THEY AGE

America is aging and so are its Veterans. In fact, Veterans aged 65 and older are a growing segment of the VHA enrolled population, and as they age, their need for advanced care increases, especially for those experiencing acute and chronic conditions. In addition, the health care industry predicts a provider shortage within the next decade which will impact both VHA and the private sector. DEAN is proactively designing and implementing programs now to ensure VA is prepared to meet the needs of older Veterans.



## Launching the GEC-NPR Pilot Program

To meet these changing demographics and to address the critical national health care shortage of geriatric providers, OAA launched a 12-month geriatrics and extended care nurse practitioner residency (GEC-NPR) pilot. With 24 residents at eight VA medical facilities, the program offers residents a full-time training experience based on a competency-based curriculum emphasizing

Veteran-centric health care. Residents receive clinical supervision for the full duration of their training program. The GEC-NPR pilot trains confident, competent, practice-ready nurse practitioners equipped with the knowledge and skills to provide quality care for the complex health needs of aging Veterans.

## ...BE THERE WHEN THEY NEED US MOST

Suicide is VA's top clinical priority. DEAN continues to support VA's 10-year strategy, and build effective networks of support, communication, and care across the communities in which Veterans live and work every day.

## Ensuring Risk Prediction through AI

A VA research study published in JAMA Network found that the Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health-Veterans Enhanced Treatment (REACH VET) program was highly effective in identifying Veterans most at risk for suicide through AI that analyzed electronic health records. The study looked at more than 173,000 Veterans before and after the implementation of the REACH VET program. Participants in the program had more outpatient encounters, increased documentation of suicide prevention safety plans, and fewer mental health admissions, emergency department visits, and documented suicide attempts. The researchers concluded that predictive modeling could improve patient care and reduce suicide risk.

## Promoting Firearm Safety

Seventy percent of Veterans who die by suicide use firearms. Working in partnership with OMHSP, ORD developed an evidence-based program to promote messaging on firearm safety. Materials were informed by the ongoing research of Dr. Steven Dobscha on screening for suicide ideation and helping providers broach the subject with Veterans. Among the materials produced was a patient brochure with messaging about safely storing firearms with a locking device and the ammunition removed, staff training and scripts to initiate discussions with Veterans, and a pocket card for care teams. Dr. Dobscha's research was also incorporated into the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for Patients at Risk for Suicide.



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The demand for physician specialties that predominantly care for older Americans will continue to increase by 2034:

**37.8K-124K** The estimated shortage of physicians by 2034, including shortfalls in both primary and specialty care

U.S. population is projected to grow by **10.6%** with a projected **42.4%** increase in those aged 65+

# 2022 AND BEYOND



At every level, VA is focused on outcomes for Veterans. We now provide 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.

**Dr. Shereef Elnahal**  
Under Secretary for Health

# RECOGNIZING SUCCESS

In 2022, DEAN affiliate program offices conferred awards upon numerous VHA professionals honoring their excellence in education, research, and innovation. Additionally, several DEAN staff and program offices were recognized by external parties for their outstanding contributions.



## Laura Zambrano-Vazquez, PhD

DAVID M. WORTHEN RISING STAR AWARD

For establishing a new academic affiliation with HBCU Prairie View A&M University that brings undergraduate students interested in health care careers and graduate education programs to VA for a two-week immersive mentoring program by VA clinicians.



## Laura Caputo, MD

DAVID M. WORTHEN INNOVATOR AWARD

For Project MODEL (Maximizing Ongoing Development and Educational Leadership), a grassroots faculty development project to share best practices in clinical education on inpatient VA units.



## Bradley "Vince" Watts, MD, MPH

DAVID M. WORTHEN CAREER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

For his leadership and scholarly contributions to quality improvement and patient safety teaching and the development of several large multisite fellowship programs in VA.

## Awards Received by DEAN Staff



### John Kaplan, PhD, JD

2022 FEDERAL LABORATORY CONSORTIUM, PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

For leadership expanding VA's Technology Transfer Program to better capture and leverage intellectual property emerging from VA research.



### Thomas Osborne, MD

ARTHUR S. FLEMMING AWARD

For outstanding achievements in advancing care through collaboration, cutting edge technologies, and transformative leadership in Federal service.



### VHA IE Staff

G2X DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION AWARD

For VHA Extended Reality (XR) Network and Arches Platform.

G2XCHANGE/FEDHEALTHIT DISRUPTIVE TECH AWARDS

For leading and transforming Federal Information Technology.



## Leigh Hochberg, MD

2022 VA MAGNUSON AWARD

For rehabilitation research to improve the lives of Veterans and others who experience stroke, ALS, spinal cord injury, and neurological disease.



## Amy Justice, MD, PhD

2022 VA MIDDLETON AWARD

For developing large data cohorts and an innovative framework to better understand comorbid conditions, effects of aging, and drug toxicity among Veterans living with HIV.



## Judith Ford, PhD

2022 VA MIDDLETON AWARD

For translational research in psychiatry, which has transformed the understanding of psychotic illnesses in Veterans.



## Adam Bock

DR. ROBERT L. JESSE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION CLINICAL AWARD

For his work on the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) Booster/Robotic Employee Accelerator.



## Charles Franklin

DR. ROBERT L. JESSE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION NON-CLINICAL AWARD

For his work on the VA Rideshare program, which has expanded Veterans' access to care.



## Eli Kaufman and Daniel Abrahamson

DR. ROBERT L. JESSE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION TEAM AWARD

For their work on Mobile Prosthetic and Orthotic Care (MoPOC).



## Keith Humphreys, PhD

2021 UNDER SECRETARY'S AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH

For research improving the understanding of factors that affect the health and quality of care for Veterans with substance use and psychiatric disorders.

# LOOKING AHEAD

## In·ten·tion·al

(adjective) /in'ten(t)SH(a)nal/

1. Performed with awareness; done deliberately, consciously, or on purpose.

In the press of the everyday, it can be challenging to stay laser-focused on the bigger picture. When faced with the exigencies of a pandemic, this dynamic became even more challenging for all health care systems.

Over the past three years, DEAN has not only supported VHA's essential missions during this public health crisis, but sustained, and often exceeded expectations in its core programs of training, research, innovation, and partnerships. Today, as the Nation emerges from the pandemic's acute phase, we have a unique opportunity to be more intentional; that is, to aspire to an even higher level of performance by more deliberately aligning efforts to VA and VHA priorities and more resolutely focusing on the needs of frontline staff.

As a starting point, in 2023, we'll be guided by the leadership of VHA's new Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal. Considered a "founding father" of VHA IE by virtue of his previous work with VHA, Dr. Elnahal has identified six priorities for the entire VHA enterprise related to hiring, access, treating Veterans with toxic exposures, high reliability, whole health, and suicide prevention.

Being more intentional in 2023 will also mean bolstering DEAN's efforts to advance VHA as a learning health care system. More specifically, our collective eye will be more closely trained on the tighter integration between VA research and clinical care. Are findings from research rapidly translated in practice? With more than 60% of VA doctors also serving as researchers, are we optimizing the chance to learn directly from Veteran patients? How are we capturing these critical lessons learned in our training programs, and how are we sharing them with the field?

Together with our Veterans as partners, DEAN will be more intentional by strengthening efforts to meet Veterans where they are and co-create a future where they feel empowered about their health.





Transforming health care for Veterans and the Nation  
through innovation, training, research, and partnerships.



Learn more at  
[www.va.gov/dean](http://www.va.gov/dean)