



National Center for
**Healthcare Advancement
and Partnerships**

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

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VHA National Center for Healthcare
Advancement and Partnerships

A Decade of Impact: Celebrating 10 Years of Partnerships for Veterans



In this issue

- A note from the chief officer and nurse executive | **2**
- Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the VHA National Community Partnership Challenge: Bridging the Gap Through Partnerships | **3**
- HAP's role in guiding and supporting non-monetary partnerships | **4**
- VA Central California and Central Valley Veterans partner to "give Veterans a hand-up, not a hand-out" | **4**
- North Florida/South Georgia VA supports VA's top clinical priority of preventing Veteran suicide | **6**
- VA San Diego and Us4Warriors address food insecurity among Veterans | **7**
- Richmond VA Medical Center partners with Delta Airlines and Richmond International Airport to help Veterans with mobility challenges travel by air | **8**
- Exercise and social connectedness keep Veterans healthy at San Francisco VA | **9**
- Celebrating achievements: CPC videos highlighting 2023 and past winners | **9**

Learn more about the organizations featured in this newsletter:

- [HUD](#)
- [Us4Warriors](#)
- [YMCA](#)

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A note from the chief officer and nurse executive

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) National Community Partnership Challenge (CPC), it is an opportune moment to reflect on a decade of transformative partnerships that have enhanced the health and well-being of Veterans across the nation. The CPC is an annual event led by the National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) on behalf of the VHA Under Secretary for Health, which celebrates the significant achievements of non-monetary partnerships between VHA and community organizations.

This special edition of the HAP newsletter highlights the milestones and successes of the CPC over the past ten years. From its inception, the CPC has recognized VHA's impactful collaborations with community organizations, focusing on key social determinants of health (SDOH) such as education, employment, food security, housing, and health care access. This year's theme, "Bridging the Gap Through Partnerships," encapsulates the ongoing commitment to fostering cooperative partnerships that address the unique needs of the Veteran population.

In this issue, you will find stories that illustrate the impact of VHA partnerships, including an overview of the 2024 CPC winners — North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System, VA Central California Health Care System, and San Diego VA Health Care System. The staff at these Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities have demonstrated dedication to improving the lives of Veterans through their innovative approaches and strong community connections. We also take this opportunity to revisit the achievements of past CPC winners, such as the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center and the San Francisco VA Health Care System, whose partnerships have continued to inspire and lead by example in the years since their recognition. Their stories serve as a reminder of the enduring value of HAP's role in recognizing and celebrating these partnerships.

The 2024 CPC winners were celebrated at the inaugural VHA National Partnership Showcase event, which culminated in the CPC awards ceremony for this year's Diamond Award recipients. In this special issue, we are pleased to highlight the educational sessions, presentations, and inspirational addresses featured at the conference from VA senior leaders, the HAP team, and Veteran community partnerships across VHA. The HAP team looks forward to hosting the annual VHA National Partnership Showcase in 2025, providing a platform for experts, newcomers, and those eager to expand VHA's community collaborations to come together and share best practices.

As you explore this issue, we hope you are inspired by the testimonies and meaningful outcomes of these collaborations. Looking ahead, we are excited to begin promoting next year's CPC and Showcase, where we will continue to recognize and celebrate creative partnerships that drive progress and innovation in Veteran care.

Thank you for joining us in celebrating this anniversary milestone. We look forward to many more years of partnership, progress, and unwavering commitment to serving our nation's heroes.

In good health,

Chien Chen,
DNP, MS, RN, PMH-BC,
NPD-BC, NEA-BC, FNAP, FAAN
*Chief Officer and
Nurse Executive, VHA HAP*
ChienJen.Chen@va.gov





Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the VHA National Community Partnership Challenge: Bridging the Gap Through Partnerships

The VHA National CPC marks its 10th anniversary this year, celebrating a decade of transformative partnerships that have advanced the health and well-being of Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Led by HAP on behalf of the VHA Under Secretary for Health, the CPC has become a cornerstone event over the past decade, recognizing outstanding collaborations in crucial areas, including suicide prevention, hunger relief, legal services, mental health, health insurance assistance, and homelessness.

A decade of impact and innovation

For 10 years, the CPC has served as a beacon of excellence, highlighting partnerships among VA medical centers, health care centers, community-based outpatient clinics, program offices, and VHA employees. Veterans who have secured stable housing, received essential mental health support, and gained new job skills are a testament to the transformative power of these collaborations.

2024 CPC theme: Bridging the Gap Through Partnerships

The theme for the 2024 CPC, “Bridging the Gap Through Partnerships,” emphasizes the importance of collaborations that connect Veterans to VA resources or enhance existing services. This initiative focuses on creating platforms for local organizations to better serve Veterans and their families, address emerging challenges, and improve the quality of life for those who have served our country.

2024 CPC winners and showcase highlights

The winners of the 2024 CPC were announced at the 2024 VHA National Partnership Showcase conference and are highlighted later in this newsletter. The showcase provided a platform to celebrate the winning initiatives for their exceptional contributions to Veteran care. These partnerships, recognized with the prestigious VHA CPC Diamond Award, have set a high standard for collaboration, innovation, and impact.

During the showcase event, attendees gained insights from these winning partnerships into how they have addressed critical needs within the Veteran community. The event featured keynote speakers, including senior leaders from VHA, who underscored the importance of partnerships in advancing the mission of VA.

Looking forward to the next decade

As the CPC enters its second decade, HAP is committed to expanding the initiative’s outreach and impact. *“The work we do together with our community partners is crucial to advancing the health and well-being of Veterans,”* said Dr. Chien Chen, HAP chief officer and nurse executive. *“As we look to the future, our goal is to build on this foundation, fostering even more innovative collaborations that address the evolving needs of our Veterans.”*

As we commemorate this milestone, we celebrate both the achievements of the past decade and the promise of future advancements. HAP proudly acknowledges the success stories that have emerged from these collaborations and looks forward to continuing to enhance the well-being of Veterans through meaningful and transformative partnerships in 2025 and beyond.

HAP's role in guiding and supporting non-monetary partnerships



HAP facilitates non-monetary partnerships between external organizations and VHA. Whether formal or informal, these partnerships are guided by HAP to ensure they are safe, ethical, consistent, and aligned with VA's mission and VHA priorities.

HAP serves as a catalyst for expanding effective collaborations at the national, state, and community levels. By raising awareness of partnership opportunities and promoting best practices, HAP helps to ensure partnerships support Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors across SDOH.

As a trusted resource and expert in non-monetary community partnerships, HAP provides consultative services and resources that support partnerships that deliver quality benefits, care, and accessible services across SDOH, such as education, employment, health care access, and housing. HAP's role extends to providing programmatic oversight through engagement, education, and policy guidance at the VHA level, ensuring all partnerships are well-supported and aligned with broader organizational goals.

One of HAP's signature contributions is its leadership of the annual VHA National CPC. By administering the CPC on behalf of the VHA Under Secretary for Health, HAP highlights the importance of collaboration between VHA and community partners in addressing diverse needs. Over the past decade, CPC-winning partnerships have contributed to the transformation of Veteran care by introducing solutions that enhance access to health care, improve quality of life, and strengthen community ties, reaching thousands of Veterans across the nation.

HAP adheres to the core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence (I-CARE), alongside Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA). These principles guide HAP's efforts to expand the reach and impact of meaningful partnerships, improving the quality of life for Veterans and their families. Through these core values, HAP ensures that initiatives are not only effective but also inclusive and equitable.

VA Central California and Central Valley Veterans partner to “give Veterans a hand-up, not a hand-out”

VA is committed to ending Veteran homelessness through collaboration with community organizations and by connecting homeless and at-risk Veterans to assistance programs. Homelessness negatively affects physical and mental health and makes accessing health care more difficult. The [rates](#) of suicidal behavior are substantially higher among Veterans who have experienced homelessness in their lifetimes compared to those who have not. Among the general population, people who are experiencing homelessness have [higher](#) rates of illness and, on average, die 12 years earlier than those who are not homeless.

According to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's](#) (HUD) 2023 [Point-in-Time](#) count, the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness increased over 7% since January 2022. VA is addressing this rise in many ways, including developing community partnerships to enhance services provided to homeless Veterans.

At this year's 10th anniversary National CPC Awards Ceremony (CPC), [VA Central California Health Care System](#) (VACCHCS) was awarded a CPC Diamond Award for their partnership with [Central Valley Veterans](#) (CVV), a nonprofit organization with a mission to “honor any United States Veteran with support and guidance to improve the quality of their life.” VACCHCS' partnership with CVV supports Veterans experiencing homelessness and others in need.

“They will help a Veteran in need no matter why the Veteran is in need,” said Mary Golden, Chief, Center for Development and Civic Engagement at VACCHCS. *“CVV is ... trusted and respected in this area. They work quickly and truly care about every Veteran that crosses their path.”*

CVV’s motto of “give Veterans a hand-up, not a hand-out” underscores their commitment to providing needed services to Veterans while empowering them to sustain success on their own. They ensure Veterans have assistance with any aspect of health and well-being, including transportation, warm hand-offs to VA staff for health care, and covering costs for wireless internet and laptops for those attending college.

In collaboration with VACCHCS, CVV provides a range of services including:

- Women Veterans Stand-Up – a one-day education program providing women Veterans a safe place to ask VA professionals wellness and mental health questions while discussing personal challenges
- Homeless Veteran Stand-Down – an event where education and services are provided to Veterans experiencing homelessness
- Employment resources – education and advocacy to hire Veterans and participation in the local Veteran Employment Committee
- Transportation – helps Veterans get to job interviews and coordination of haircuts and clothing

CVV acts as the fiscal agent for Veterans and will pay for the following:

- Overdue electric bills that prevent Veterans from activating electricity at a new residence
- Pre-housing background checks required by property owners/managers
- New ID for Veterans or spouses who don’t have the ID required for housing placement
- Hospitality House, a home located near VA for homeless women Veterans with children
- Emergency hotel stays for women, disabled Veterans, and their children
- Deposits for Veteran housing through HUD VA Supportive Housing
- Storage facilities for Veteran’s possessions
- Rent, when a Veteran is facing homelessness

VA resources

- [VA Homeless Programs](#): Resources for Veterans experiencing homelessness
- [Permanent Housing Assistance for Veterans](#): Information about the program with HUD
- [Homeless Veterans Community Employment Services](#): Employment services offered to Veterans experiencing homelessness
- [Health Care for Homeless Veterans](#): Resources for obtaining health care for Veterans experiencing homelessness
- [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#): Help line for Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- [HUD-VA Supportive Housing \(HUDVASH\)](#): A collaborative program that pairs HUD’s Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance with VA case management and supportive services

To learn more about Central Valley Veterans, visit their [website](#).



VA Central California Health Care System

North Florida/South Georgia VA supports VA's top clinical priority of preventing Veteran suicide

The latest [data](#) shows that 6,392 Veterans died by suicide in 2021, which is an increase of 114 from 2020. To address the rising numbers, VA has made preventing Veteran suicide their top clinical priority.

In 2022, North Florida/South Georgia VA Health System (NF/SG VA), recognized the need for more immediate response to Veterans admitted to non-VA hospitals for suicidal ideation or a suicide attempt and started an initiative to help ensure Veterans in crisis have the support they need. This initiative won a 2024 National CPC award.

"In the 10 years HAP has been hosting the CPC, nearly 39% of submitted community partnerships have addressed suicide prevention." said Georgi Bady, HAP health system specialist. *"We are proud to recognize NF/SG VA for their exceptional work to support Veteran suicide prevention."*



Veterans experience higher rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts compared to their civilian counterparts. Veterans in the North Florida/South Georgia area experiencing suicidal ideation or who had a suicide attempt were often admitted to non-VA facilities, but NF/SG VA was unaware of these admissions, and unable to provide immediate assistance.

"There were many metrics that were not met post-discharge, such as four visits in 30 days and the creation of a safety plan in seven days, because we didn't know Veterans were being admitted to community facilities," said Katherine Sperry, NF/SG VA Health System Suicide Prevention/CEPC Program Supervisor. *"The highest risk of dying by suicide is 30 days after discharge from an inpatient setting, so we ensured we were receiving notification when a Veteran was admitted for suicidal ideation or an attempt."*

To address these challenges, Ms. Sperry developed a program that allows for real-time action to help a Veteran in crisis. When a Veteran is admitted to one of the community hospitals in their network for suicidal ideation or a suicide attempt, NF/SG VA is notified in real time and immediately sends a suicide prevention coordinator (SPC) to the Veteran. The SPC helps schedule the Veteran's post-discharge appointments, creates a safety plan, and gets them the needed follow up. There are opportunities to enroll a previously unenrolled Veteran in VA health care through this process.

"We're meeting Veterans in their darkest time and letting them know they have support," said Ms. Sperry. *"They have someone to help navigate a complicated system."*

NF/SG VA also provides Veterans with a packet upon discharge that includes a gun lock, a myriad of VA resources, and information about 988, the Veterans Crisis Line.

This initiative has spread to 7 hospitals in the North Florida/South Georgia area since its inception. It has connected SPCs with over 350 Veterans, and none of those Veterans have gone on to die by suicide.

One Veteran said about the initiative, *"It felt like the VA cared about what was going on with me, even when getting care in my local community and not just at the VA medical center."*

VA suicide prevention resources

- [Suicide Prevention – Mental Health](#): Resources for Veterans experiencing homelessness
- [Don't Wait. Reach out](#): a space for Veterans to proactively seek support and resources on their mental health
- [Veterans Crisis Line](#): a free, confidential resource for all Veterans, regardless of their VA enrollment status, management and supportive services

VA San Diego and Us4Warriors address food insecurity among Veterans

[One in nine](#) working-age Veterans are food insecure, and 1.2 million low-income Veterans use the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Food insecurity heightens the risk of type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and obesity. People faced with food insecurity are also more likely to struggle with mental and behavioral health issues, and children struggling to get enough food are more likely to have problems in school and other social situations.

[Jennifer Moreno VA Medical Center in San Diego](#) (VA San Diego) is one of HAP's CPC 2024 winners for the Food Empowerment Program that addresses food insecurity among Veterans living in their community.



In 2018, VA San Diego developed a partnership with [Us4Warriors](#), a California Veteran Service Organization (VSO) dedicated to improving the lives of service members, Veterans, and their families, and created the Food Empowerment Program. This program is co-chaired by two registered dietitians, Leslie Miranda and Kristen McCutcheon.

“HAP is excited to recognize VA San Diego for their work to address Veteran food insecurity,” said Georgi Bady, HAP health system specialist. *“Everyone deserves to know where their next meal is coming from, and the Food Empowerment Program is helping ensure that Veterans have access to the resources they need.”*

In 2021, VA [implemented](#) the food insecurity screening that is given to Veterans twice a year at VA medical centers. This screening helps VA San Diego and the Food Empowerment Program connect with more Veterans in need of food and related resources.

When Veterans screen positive for food insecurity at VA San Diego, the Food Empowerment Program provides them a one-time bag filled with non-perishable food items and resources, including information on local food bank locations, other food distribution services, local VSOs, food delivery services for seniors, and other ways to ensure they have enough food. They also include their resource guide that contains information on housing, obtaining medical care, and other community-based resources to help Veterans and their families.

Each food bag contains about 15 pounds of non-perishable food including grains, beans, canned fruits and vegetables, packaged meats such as canned tuna and chicken, cereal, and snacks. The program gives Veterans the opportunity to meet with a dietician to discuss food budgeting and meal planning. Program staff also ensure Veterans are connected to social work resources available at VA San Diego.

Talking about the growth of the program, Leslie Miranda, Advanced Practice Dietician at VA San Diego, said, *“We’ve grown to where the program is interdisciplinary — we have social workers, licensed vocational nurses, registered nurses — we’re really lucky because there’s no way we’d be able to distribute these bags and connect with Veterans without everyone involved.”*

To date, the Food Empowerment Program has handed out nearly 700 bags of food to Veterans in the VA San Diego system. *“Being recognized through CPC will definitely bring attention to the program,”* said Ms. Miranda. *“It’s really exciting.”*

Along with the Food Empowerment Program, the partnership with Us4Warriors expanded to include a quarterly food distribution drive-up event out of the Kearny Mesa community-based outpatient clinic. Veterans register online and can drive up and receive a food bag on the day of the event. To date, 515 Veterans have participated in these events.

Richmond VA Medical Center partners with Delta Airlines and Richmond International Airport to help Veterans with mobility challenges travel by air

A [2018 survey](#) reported that over 250,000 Veterans use wheelchairs and this number is growing due to advances in medicine and rehabilitation that prolong the lives of people with disabilities. Despite these medical advances, safe and accessible air travel remains a concern for those who use a wheelchair or have other mobility challenges. Around 84% of Veterans [surveyed](#) by [Paralyzed Veterans of America](#) said they would fly more often with improved access, and 9% of respondents said they no longer travel by air because they fear bodily harm, damage to their wheelchair, or general aircraft inaccessibility.

To help address these challenges, the [Richmond VA Medical Center](#) (Richmond VAMC), formerly Hunter Holmes McGuire Hospital, partners with Delta Airlines and Richmond International Airport to provide training for airline workers and airport personnel, Veterans with a new spinal cord injury, and their caregivers on traveling with and assisting Veterans who use wheelchairs and other mobility aids.

Richmond VAMC was awarded a National Community Partnership Challenge Diamond Award, in the CPC's inaugural year, for their innovative partnership with Delta Airlines and Richmond International Airport.



“The Community Partnership Challenge celebrates the innovative partnerships between VHA and community organizations that advance Veteran health care,” said Georgi Bady, HAP health system specialist. *“HAP is proud to recognize this outstanding partnership between Richmond VAMC and Delta Airlines for the work they do to help Veterans and their caregivers navigate the difficult terrain of air travel.”*

Newly injured Veteran patients who receive care at the Richmond VAMC and need accessible air travel participate in a training at the airport to learn what to expect when they travel. Rehabilitation therapists take Veterans and their caregivers on a dry run, where they learn about the Transportation Security Administration regulations, practice the security screening process, move on and off an aisle chair, and learn about the United Service Organizations resources available at the airport. Veterans and their caregivers are encouraged to ask questions and discuss any anxieties they have about air travel.

“As a training tool, this is quite beneficial to our newly injured patients and those that may have anxieties about traveling,” said Jennifer Vass, recreational therapist, Richmond VAMC. *“[As a CPC winner] we wanted to recognize Delta’s commitment to Veterans and feel like it was a great program to highlight.”*

Before doing the hands-on work at the airport, Richmond VAMC recreational therapists offer classroom training and provide information and resources about how to check with the airline before traveling to ensure the airline understands and can properly accommodate the Veteran’s needs.

“Every Veteran I’ve taken through this program has said it’s been very helpful,” said Irene Montero, recreational therapist at Richmond VAMC. *“It gives a lot of our Veterans the confidence and comfort that they can travel again despite their change in mobility needs.”*

Since the program began, Richmond VAMC staff have supported approximately 10 Veterans through this program annually. The number of Veterans the program helps annually is increasing, and, since 2023, almost 20 Veterans have successfully completed the program, all of whom were diagnosed with new spinal cord injuries.

Richmond VAMC’s partnership with Delta Airlines and Richmond International Airport continues to support disabled Veterans.

Exercise and social connectedness keep Veterans healthy at San Francisco VA

Exercise [provides](#) both physical and mental health benefits, including preventative and therapeutic benefits for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer disease, and depression. There is also preliminary [evidence](#) that shows exercise may be a useful treatment to reduce symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Veterans.

Supporting Veterans' mental and physical health and well-being through the [Whole Health model](#) is the cornerstone of VA health care. HAP facilitates and recognizes partnerships aimed at achieving this goal.

In 2016, the [San Francisco VA Health Care System](#) (SFVA) was honored with the VHA CPC Diamond Award for their partnership with the [YMCA](#). The partnership aims to increase the physical activity of Veterans in the San Francisco area.

"We're committed to helping Veterans get and stay physically active," said Dr. Chien Chen, HAP chief officer and nurse executive. *"Being active is paramount for physical and mental well-being, and partnerships' dedication to enhancing Veteran health is of foundational importance."*

Local YMCAs connect Veterans with resources in their community, focusing on healthy lifestyle programming and reintegrating Veterans into the community. Typical offerings at YMCAs include opportunities for exercise, physical movement, and social connections.

Through its partnership with the YMCA, SFVA runs the Strength & Wellness Program, which provides 8- and 10-week group fitness classes for Veterans at local YMCAs. They also offer one-on-one fitness programs for those not suited for group classes. SFVA staff approach Veterans from a whole health perspective and identify which aspects of care and wellness they want to focus on instead of treating just one disease or condition. Anywhere from 10 to 20 Veterans complete each 8- or 10-week program.

Recreation therapists at SFVA also tailor programs for Veterans so they can continue their physical fitness at home or a gym of their choice outside of the classes offered at the YMCA.

"It's important to get Veterans moving, for their physical and mental well-being," said Christian Dillon, recreation therapist with SFVA. *"I've had Veterans with PTSD who haven't left their house finally get out into the community because of this program and partnership. We're always looking for those little things to help improve a Veteran's quality of life."*

Getting Veterans physically active is only part of the goal of the program. Providing social opportunities and a community has proven benefits to Veteran mental health. [According](#) to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, social connection protects against chronic disease and serious illness like heart disease, stroke, dementia, depression, and anxiety. Social connectedness also improves healthy eating habits; physical activity; the ability to manage stress, anxiety, and depression; and sleep quality.

[Studies](#) show that Veterans with PTSD can experience symptom relief through a variety of non-medical interventions including social reintegration. Prioritizing engagement in their communities, linking Veterans back with their support



structures, and empowering them to be able to communicate openly and honestly with that network is vital to improving their physical and mental health.

Mr. Dillon spoke about the importance of the program connecting Veterans to their community: *“You can’t even quantify the benefits of having our Veterans out in the community and having the support of the YMCA staff there. Physical exercise and connection with their community decreases some of their anxiety levels and depression. It’s been invaluable.”*

The participants and their families have praised the program and noticed considerable improvements in their health after completion.

One Veteran said, *“I needed an exercise regimen addressing my physical and mental needs as I am a severely wounded Vietnam veteran, and the two plus hours twice a week workout was just the ticket...I appreciate the opportunity YMCA has provided for the Strength & Wellness program providing a clean workout studio with a staff attentive to the needs of my fellow veterans.”*

A participant’s daughter said, *“Since beginning the program in 2022, it has changed [my dad’s] life in many positive ways. It has helped him with his depression, loneliness, and mental state and has provided an opportunity for him to have an outlet while learning to be healthier both in his mind and his body...the classes have empowered him and have allowed him to build confidence in himself and be happier overall.”*

This program started with one YMCA and only individual training. It quickly expanded to include three sites, group classes, and individual programming. Today, the program operates out of the Stonestown YMCA and Presidio YMCA in San Francisco, CA.

To learn more about VHA’s partnership with YMCA, read the partnership [announcement](#).

Celebrating achievements: CPC videos highlighting 2023 and past winners

As part of the 10th anniversary celebration, HAP is excited to present two special videos that showcase the achievements of both the 2023 winners and select CPC past winners. These videos offer an inspiring look into the impactful partnerships that have made a difference in the lives of Veterans and their communities.

Key highlights:

The videos highlight the diverse and innovative efforts of CPC winners, illustrating how partnerships successfully address various needs within the Veteran community. From enhancing mental health support to fostering community engagement, these stories demonstrate the power of collaboration in driving positive change.

Watch the videos:

Explore the achievements of this year’s winners and past honorees by watching the videos at the links below:



2023 Winners Video



All Winners Video

Looking ahead:

As we celebrate these past successes, we also look forward to the future. The 2025 CPC is on the horizon, and we are excited to celebrate the next round of meaningful and impactful partnership winners. Stay tuned for updates!



*For more information about VHA partnerships, visit
[va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships.asp](https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/partnerships.asp)*

VA



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Veterans Health Administration
National Center for Healthcare
Advancement and Partnerships

To share a partnership opportunity or consult with HAP on a non-monetary partnership, please contact our office via email:

VHA_Partnerships@va.gov
[va.gov/healthpartnerships](https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships)