



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration

OFFICE OF NURSING SERVICES

2023 ANNUAL REPORT





A Message from Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services/Chief Nursing Officer Dr. M. Christopher Saslo and Executive Director and Deputy Chief Nursing Officer Dr. Jennifer Strawn

Welcome to the 2023 Office of Nursing Services (ONS) Annual Report. This report clearly demonstrates VA nurses' commitment to excellence and safe, quality care. VA nurses are leaders at every level, and are masters of collaboration, evidence-based practice, and innovation -- all in service of the nation's heroes. In this document, we highlight the truly remarkable progress each of you has made toward fulfilling our collective vision of advancing nursing and transforming health care. We are exceptionally pleased to highlight your achievements. As you review this report, please take a moment to reflect upon, acknowledge, and most of all, celebrate all you have achieved.

In 2022, the National Nursing Leadership Committee and the Health Care Delivery Council approved the 2022-2032 VHA Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan (NWSP). The four pillars, or strategic goals, are designed to ensure a strong nursing workforce necessary to meet the four statutory missions of VA while also supporting VA's six health care priorities. Through these pillars, and their enabling strategies, incredible strides have been made in strengthening the VA nursing workforce. Most notably, the VA nursing workforce has grown significantly over this past year, to 119,388 nursing staff. During FY23, VA has hired more than 8,580 new nursing personnel. Along with employing the most Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists than ever before, the growth represents the highest number of nursing personnel hired in the last 25+ years.

Along this journey, several VA health care systems have pursued the American Nurses Credentialing Center Pathway to Excellence® (PTE®) and Magnet® designations, programs recognizing organizations that demonstrate positive practice environments where nurses excel. To qualify, these organizations met stringent standards supporting work environments that recognize nurse contributions, support professional development, and nurture optimal work settings -- all facets integral to the NWSP.

Please join us in celebrating and recognizing the following health care systems that, in FY23, were awarded a PTE® or Magnet® designation, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to their nursing staff and for vigorously pursuing excellence in all they do.

- » VA Providence Health Care System (PTE® redesignation)
- » VA South Texas Health Care System (PTE® redesignation)
- » VA Boston Health Care System (PTE® redesignation)
- » VA Asheville Health Care System (PTE® redesignation)
- » VA Wichita Health Care System (PTE® designation)
- » VA Illiana Health Care System (PTE® designation)
- » VA Houston Health Care System (Magnet®)



Dr. Saslo (L) and Dr. Strawn

We could not be more proud about the progress made in 2023, across VA, by you, our exceptionally passionate and caring nursing staff. As we collectively look ahead to 2024, please take a moment to review the short video, accessed through a QR code, where we will share several insights and areas of focus for VA nursing in 2024, such that all VA nurses can participate in driving change across our organization. We are both deeply honored to be VA nurses, with you, as we pursue the transformational changes being enabled through the NWSP and other initiatives and are here to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you, as we take VA nursing to new heights.

  Watch Dr. Saslo and Dr. Strawn share insights and areas of focus for VA nursing in 2024 in this video.

DR. JENNIFER A. STRAWN,
DNP, RN, NEA-BC

DR. M. CHRISTOPHER SASLO,
DNS, ARNP-BC, FAANP

Contents

About Office of Nursing Services (ONS).....	4
The Four Pillars of VHA Nursing.....	6
VHA's Health Care Priorities	8
Freedom Sings USA®: VA Veteran Nurses Share Their Stories Through Song	10
Pillar 1: Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice	12
Freedom Sings USA: Showcasing Hidden Strengths Through Storytelling.....	14
Pillar 2: Strengthening the Nursing Workforce.....	16
Freedom Sings USA: A Special Endeavor for All Involved.....	18
Pillar 3: Reimagining Lifelong Learning and Career Development	20
Freedom Sings USA: The Power of Music Healing Through Song	22
Pillar 4: Inspiring an Industry-Leading Culture.....	24
VHA Nursing by the Numbers 2023.....	26
Cherished Memories: Nurses Month 2023	28
Celebrating Success.....	30



About Office of Nursing Services (ONS)

To achieve our mission of honoring Veterans by delivering exceptional health care, ONS oversees the practice of nursing for the largest nursing workforce in the United States. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) nurses consistently go above and beyond to positively impact the lives of Veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors, and communities across the nation, and play a crucial role in Veterans' comprehensive long-term health and well-being.

As you read through this annual report, you'll learn how VHA nurses play a crucial role in the comprehensive, long-term well-being of Veterans, and how ONS helps them to succeed. As VHA nurses continue to push the boundaries of innovation, research, and evidence-based practice, they consistently excel and transform the lives of those entrusted to their care, regardless of the challenges nurses face.

This world-class, Veteran-centric standard of care is made possible through the efforts of VHA front-line nurses, and the dedicated support provided by ONS portfolios.



Learn more about ONS at va.gov/nursing.

Dr. Strawn visited the Birmingham VA Health Care System in Alabama and spent time with direct care nursing staff and students from the University of Alabama School of Nursing.

VHA's mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being. To achieve this, **VHA provides care at:**

1,321 health care facilities, including **172 VA medical centers** and **1,138 VA outpatient care sites**, serving more than **9 million enrolled Veterans** annually.

The ONS portfolios are a collection of areas of responsibilities and expertise under a single leader. There are two main operational organizations in ONS: clinical operations (CCICM, CP, REA, and WFL) and the business operations (SPC, PLPS, and ONS-TC) of nursing.



The **Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CCICM)** portfolio supports the field implementation of the framework for Veterans who have complex care coordination needs. Veterans with comprehensive, complex care coordination needs are identified and assigned a Lead Coordinator to improve care integration, outcomes, and cost across the continuum.



The **Clinical Practice (CP)** portfolio supports the field through consultation with subject matter experts across multiple domains of nursing. CP comprises the Clinical Practice Program (CPP) with 12 field advisory councils, the National Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) Practice Program, the National Nursing Practice Council (NNPC), Enterprise Standardization, and other nursing practice initiatives.



The **Policy, Legislation, and Professional Standards (PLPS)** portfolio eliminates legislative barriers to nursing practice and staffing by developing, reviewing, and implementing national VA and VHA Policy and legislative proposals. Professional qualification standards for nursing are overseen.



The **Research, Evidence-Based Practice, and Analytics (REA)** portfolio supports the field through scientific discovery of new nursing knowledge, Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) and implementation science, and nursing analytics. REA oversees the Nursing Research Field Advisory Council (NRFAC) and consortia-based nurse scientists who support field-based nurse researchers.



The **Strategic Planning and Communications (SPC)** leads the development and implementation of the 2022-2032 VHA NWSP, creating strategies and resources that empower the nursing workforce to meet the four statutory missions of VA. SPC also communicates timely, relevant, and useful information designed to inform and to highlight stories of excellence in VA nursing and to inspire continued innovation that supports the advancement of nursing and the transformation of health care.



The **ONS Travel Corps (ONS-TC)** portfolio represents an internal pool of Registered Nurses (RN) and Certified Nurse Practitioners (NP) available to support supplemental staffing needs throughout VHA. Travel Corps field staff support nursing in rural and underserved areas and during national emergencies while maintaining ONS' high standards of safe, high quality, patient care.



The **Workforce and Leadership (WFL)** portfolio supports the field related to leadership/succession planning, transition to practice, staffing methodology, and pursuit of nursing excellence. These efforts create a pipeline for a well-prepared and competent VA nursing workforce, succession planning, and provision of safe, effective, high-quality, patient-driven care.

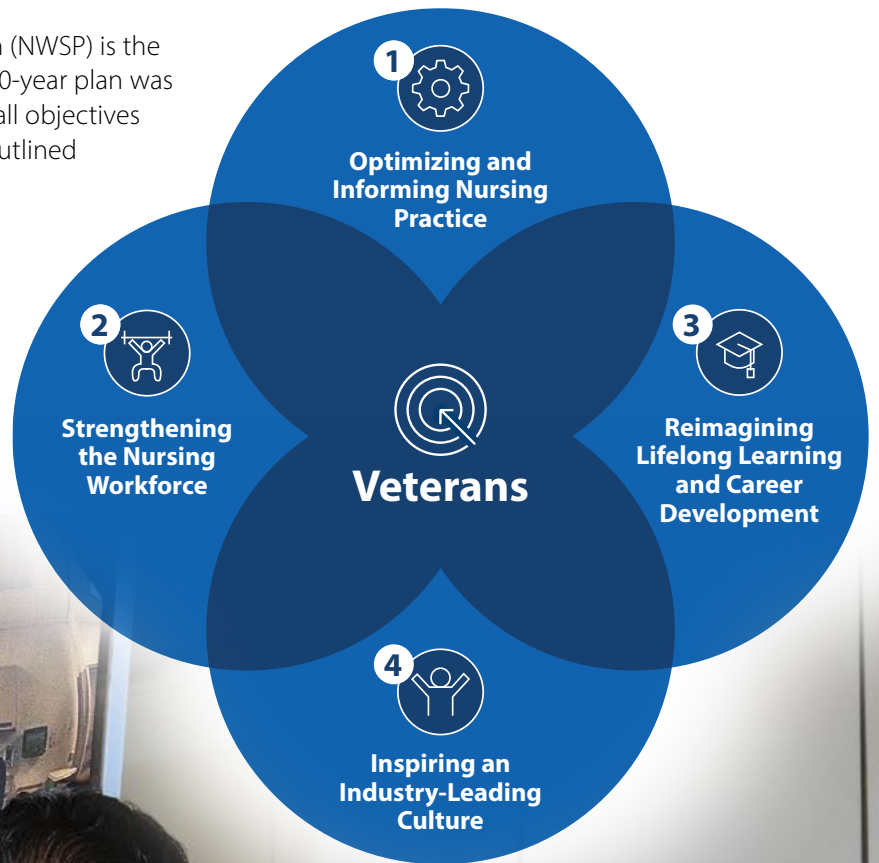


VA is the largest employer of nursing personnel, with more than 119,000 nurses. ONS supports the following nurses who work across VHA:

- ▶ Nursing Assistants (NA)
- ▶ Licensed Practical Nurses/Licensed Vocational Nurses (LPN/LVN)
- ▶ Registered Nurses (RN)
- ▶ Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA)
- ▶ Certified Nurse Midwives (CNM)
- ▶ Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS)
- ▶ Certified Nurse Practitioners (CNP)

The Four Pillars of VHA Nursing

The 2022-2032 VHA Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan (NWSP) is the guiding force for professional practice. In 2022, the 10-year plan was divided into four pillars and twelve goals to achieve all objectives by 2032. The pillars and VA Health Care Priorities as outlined below ensure an innovative, best-in-class nursing workforce and help Veterans, their families, survivors, and caregivers build trust in VHA. The NWSP serves as a roadmap to help VHA nursing meet VA's four statutory missions and the health care needs of the nation's Veterans.



Melissa Diaz, RN (L), Jose Alfaro (C), a medical instrument technician, and Kimberly Jobe, RN, work in the GI and SPU clinic at Southern Arizona VA Health Care System in Tucson.

Pillar One: Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice

- » VHA is a leader in developing national standards of practice for RNs and LPNs across all geographies and care settings.
- » Nurses hold leadership positions that define and drive the strategy in peer-to-peer collaboration with other leaders to influence and improve health care delivery.
- » VHA nursing is the gold standard globally for innovative health science research and translation of science into practice to maximize value to Veterans, the community, and the health care industry.



Pillar Two: Strengthening the Nursing Workforce

- » VHA's dynamic, streamlined, and employee-centric onboarding process offers accessible support and shortens times-to-unit for new hires.
- » VHA is the employer of choice, providing flexibility, mobility in career pathways, and best-in-class research and residency programs, attracting high-caliber and diverse talent.



Pillar Three: Reimagining Lifelong Learning and Career Development

- » Nurses in all settings have protected time for unparalleled breadth and depth of opportunities in education, research, teaching, and leadership experiences.
- » Nurses have comprehensive, personalized developmental journeys customized to meet goals and guide their chosen career progression.
- » VHA fosters an environment of intellectual challenge and pursuit.



Pillar Four: Inspiring an Industry-Leading Culture

- » VHA cultivates a diverse and inclusive workforce that serves Veterans, families, survivors, and caregivers of all backgrounds and builds trust, cultural competencies, and catalyzed, dynamic teams.
- » VHA employs an industry-leading shared governance model across all settings of care.
- » VHA benefits, compensation, and workplace environment outpace the private sector.



VA'S 4 MISSIONS

1. To provide lifetime high-quality care for Veterans
2. To conduct research on issues that affect Veterans
3. To provide education to the nation's health care workers
4. To support the nation by backing up the American health care system during disasters and national emergencies

VHA's Health Care Priorities

VHA's six health care priorities are the top-level strategic and operational advancements of the greatest importance that must be reached by VHA. These clear and actionable achievements deserve VHA's focused commitment and the best use of available resources. Field-based front line and leadership nurses, nurse scientists, clinical nurse leaders, and program office representatives have made significant progress toward achieving these goals by employing a workstream framework aligned with the four pillars of the NWSP. Below is just a small example of the tremendous strides made in 2023.

VA Health Care Priorities



Hire faster and more competitively



Connect Veterans to the soonest and best care



Serve Veterans with military environmental exposures



Support Veterans' whole health, their caregivers, and survivors



Accelerate VA's journey to a High Reliability Organization



Prevent Veteran suicide

NWSP Pillars



Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice



Strengthening the Nursing Workforce



Reimagining Lifelong Learning and Career Development



Inspiring an Industry-Leading Culture

ONS and VA Nursing Workforce 2023 Outcomes

1



PILLAR ONE: OPTIMIZING AND INFORMING NURSING PRACTICE

- Workstream 1:** 83% of VISNs now have a dedicated Chief Nursing Officer (CNO), and a CNO playbook is in development. Turn to page 33 to read more about the work of CNOs across the nation.
- Workstream 2:** Continued work on optimizing standards of practice for all nursing roles across VA/VHA documents to reflect current legislation/authorities, evidence base and nursing staff practice at the top of education and certification.
- Workstream 3:** Developed and implemented a CCICM framework, as well as a CCICM Outcome and Practice Management dashboard. Developed a care innovation library to improve and accelerate care delivery through automation and predictive analytics.

2



PILLAR TWO: STRENGTHENING THE NURSING WORKFORCE

- Workstream 4:** VA's total nursing workforce grew by 8,580 employees, a 7.7% increase and the highest growth rate in 25+ years, to a nursing workforce numbering 119,000+ strong.
- Workstream 5:** The 3R (recruitment, retention, and relocation) toolkit was published. The St. Cloud VA, in partnership with Minnesota Department of Health, developed and implemented a Nurse Assistant Training Course. To date, 100% of enrollees have successfully completed the course and more than 50% of course graduates have secured or are in the process of securing employment with VA.
- Workstream 6:** The Registered Nurse Transition to Practice Residency Program led to a 29% growth in new graduate nurse hires.
- Workstream 7:** Leveraged analytics to forecast supply and demand, and proactively hired and allocated resources to ensure optimal talent deployment from entrance on duty to retirement, utilizing real-time predictive analytics across the employee journey.

3



PILLAR THREE: REIMAGINING LIFELONG LEARNING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Workstream 8:** Prepared a refresh of the Let's Get Certified campaign to encourage the nursing workforce to invest in specialty education and certifications to continue elevating Veteran safety, quality of care, and outcomes, while also improving nurse experience and expertise. Targeting January 2024 for re-launch.
- Workstream 9:** Strengthened the commitment to lifelong learning, cutting-edge research, and expanding the nurse pathways to employment through partnerships with national nursing organizations and the State of the Art (SOTA) Nursing Research conference.

4



PILLAR FOUR: INSPIRING AN INDUSTRY-LEADING CULTURE

- Workstream 10:** Developed a Shared Governance Playbook and toolkits, the first crucial step in developing a culture of excellence across all settings of care.
- Workstream 11:** Developed a guidebook for release in January 2024 for the five best practices for employee engagement and recognition. This included a standardized outline for new nurse orientations, as well as a highlight of VHA offerings such as employee benefits.
- Workstream 12:** Great strides in refining benefits and compensation to be more competitive with the private sector, leading to increased recruiting and retaining more staff.



Freedom Sings USA®: VA Veteran Nurses Share Their Stories Through Song

RN Gorecki and 10 other nurses who are also military Veterans told their stories through the creative songwriting process thanks to Freedom Sings USA, a nonprofit in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The organization's mission is to help Veterans, service members, and their families tell their stories through song. During Nurses Month in May 2023, Freedom Sings USA debuted the 11 songs written by VA Veteran nurses. You'll read more about them and their songs in the pages of this report.

*I walk the halls
In scrubs not fatigues.
Reaching out,
To people just like me.*

**Invisible Scars,
Loretta Gorecki**

Participating Veteran Nurse Songwriters



James Adams



Marvia Balfour-Coleman



Christine Brooks



Loretta Gorecki



Nikki Kemp



Stephanie Leach



Hansel Moore



Susan Pelz



Ramona Ross



Roland Sauerland



Kristine Sorto

The nonprofit Freedom Sings USA helps Veterans, service members, and their families reach emotional balance through the creative process of songwriting. Telling their stories through songs helps Veterans cope with military experiences or transition to civilian life. They also receive peer support and other vital resources through Freedom Sings USA.

VHA Partners with Freedom Sings USA

When Michael Dobbs, Little Rock, Arkansas VAMC Chief of Voluntary Services, asked Army Veteran and CRNA Paul Tull to participate in the inaugural songwriting weekend retreat, Tull says it was a "no-brainer." Tull, who has been writing and performing for many years, said his experience with the non-profit was so powerful that he's been volunteering with Freedom Sings USA ever since.



Paul Tull (C) was recognized for his work with Freedom Sings USA by Assistant Under Secretaries Dr. Christopher Saslo and Dr. Erica Scavella.

*“Many song topics are difficult to share and have ranged from combat [to] often violent situations to military sexual trauma (MST), to just the thrill of coming home. ‘Survivor’s guilt’ is likely the most recurring theme. Each song is crafted with respect and an abundance of care with the Veteran, who has the final say on every word in the song. **We stress that no song is complete until the Veteran songwriter is satisfied.**”*

- PAUL TULL

Let me help you,
 Let me heal you,
 I know you're hurting,
 I am there, too.
 I see who you are,
 With these invisible scars.



Loretta Gorecki, "Invisible Scars"

Loretta Gorecki, RN, served as a U.S. Marine and is the Acting Nurse Manager for a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Chicago, Illinois, aligned with the Edward J. Hines VA Medical Center. In Gorecki's song, she writes that when her uniform changed from military fatigues to scrubs, her mission did not. She still proudly supports her fellow Veterans as a VA nurse.

*"We, as VA nurses, have a unique journey to help those who have borne the battle. Veteran nurses understand and relate to the invisible scars. Still, all VA nurses are here to help **heal visible and invisible wounds.**"*

- LORETTA GORECKI, RN



Nikki Kemp, "Soldier On," and "Nikki's Greeting"

Nikki Kemp, a former Army Specialist and an RN in the Spinal Cord Unit at VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System, wants Veterans to know he is with them through their fight to regain their lives and health. "I would recommend Freedom Sings USA to any Veteran that asks," he says of his experience.

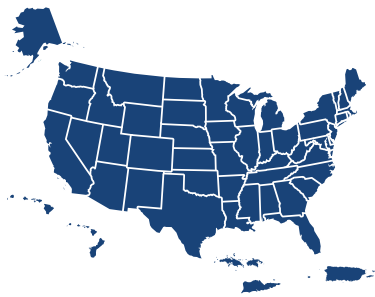
*I'll do everything I can.
 Together, we can do this.
 You still have purpose,
 We can give you back your life
 You're gonna be all right.
 Be brave,
 Be strong,
 Soldier on.*



Listen to VA Nurse Veterans songs on "The Way Back: Songs of Healing By VA Nurses" album at Freedom Sings USA.



Pillar 1



VHA health care is regionally divided into

18 VETERANS INTEGRATED SERVICE NETWORKS

(VISNs), systems of care working together to meet local Veteran health care needs and provide greater access to care.

Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice

ONS works with the nursing workforce to seize opportunities and leverage resources to benefit Veterans. Continue reading for a glimpse of the remarkable contributions VA nurses made in 2023 while enhancing health care practices for the betterment of Veterans and the profession.

An Investment in Evidence-Based Practice

VHA and the Department of Defense (DoD) received a Joint Incentive Fund (JIF) grant for \$1.7 million to build a shared VHA and DoD platform to collaborate on EBP initiatives across both federal agencies. The two-year funded award will enable the Helen Fuld Health Trust National Institute to educate clinical staff on EBP at five DoD facilities and VISN 22 facilities. By sharing resources and findings between DoD and VA, this partnership will ensure that active-duty Service members and Veterans continue to receive high-quality, evidence-based care while automating components of the search for evidence on topics of concern to nurses.

Expanding EBP Knowledge

The EBP Field Advisory Committee (FAC) is developing an 8-session course to educate staff on EBP. The program, expected to be ready for pilot in 2024, will be VHA-focused, taught by VHA EBP FAC members, and will

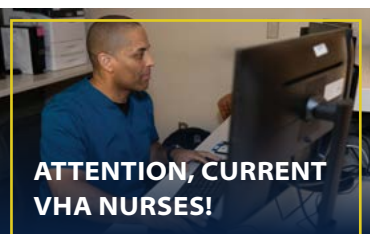
include continuing professional education credits. The FACS include ONS Clinical Advisors and members from front line nursing.

CCICM Rolls Out New Dashboard

In partnership with field nurses, care managers, care coordinators, and case managers, ONS and Care Management and Social Work Services promotes continuity of care and positive outcomes for Veterans with complex care coordination needs through CCICM. The new CCICM dashboard provides specific data per VISN, nationally, down to the site level. The dashboard measures the number of sites participating, where the sites are located, the number of lead coordinators assigned, and the cost savings posted per VISN. It also evaluates current team assignments, patient demographics, outcomes, and Lead Coordinator (LC) outputs.



Six questions about CCICM



ATTENTION, CURRENT VHA NURSES!

Join the EBP Open Forum call on the third Thursday of the month to learn more and see what your colleagues are doing to improve VHA care for Veterans! Go to EBP on the ONS SharePoint and click on the calendar invite to participate each month.

IN →
2023:

139 SITES participated in CCICM.

15 SITES completed all five milestones and have fully implemented the CCICM framework.

840 LEAD COORDINATORS served 6,500 Veterans across 56 health care systems.



Kevin Walker

Faces From the Field: HRO in Action

RN Kevin Walker, an ICU nurse with the VA Ann Arbor Health Care System, noticed that the single-lumen infusion catheter was open to possible air entry by removing the standard blue cap. The flaw was brought to the attention of an anesthesiologist. After discussion, it was determined that installing a stopcock (a needle-free valve) directly into the catheter after insertion would be a good safety measure. The anesthesiologist then shared this practice change with the other anesthesia team members, providing on-the-spot education for staff in the ICU to increase nursing staff awareness and prevent potential patient harm.

OVER **5** MILLION SERVED

In June 2019, the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network initiated a new way of providing access to health care and services all day, every day of the year for Veterans enrolled for care across VISN 8. In 2023, the VISN 8 Clinical Contact Center team has responded to more than **5 MILLION CALLS** from Veterans and their caregivers! This fantastic team comprises registered nurses, certified nurse practitioners, and other medical and allied professionals.



Optimizing Nursing Practices for All Veterans

In a first-of-its-kind event held at the San Francisco VA Health Care System, ONS provided a seminar called “Assessing/ Inspecting and Preventing Pressure Injury in Darker Skin Tones.” The course provided an interactive educational program addressing gaps in knowledge related to darker skin tones, educating health care professionals on how to correctly identify and inspect/assess skin color differences related to pressure injuries in Veterans with more pigmentation.

Caring for Veterans with Toxic Exposure



A nurse performs a toxic exposure screening on a Veteran at Colorado Springs VA.

Toxic exposure screenings are available at VA medical centers and clinics nationwide. These screenings are critical to identifying Veterans who may have been exposed to toxins during their military service. This is part of the implementation of the Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022. More than 4.1 million Veterans have received free screenings. Nurses across the health care system have been vital to the success of this work.

Preventing Non-Ventilator Hospital Acquired-Pneumonia (NV-HAP)

Field nurses continue fighting to prevent hospital acquired pneumonia (HAP), the most frequent, costly, and deadly of all hospital associated infections. ONS has partnered with VA's National Infectious Disease Services (NIDS) to lead a team of subject matter experts who are developing advanced measurement tools that dramatically drop infection rates in the Veteran population.

Protecting High-Risk Veterans

In 2023, the Clinical Practice Program (CPP) collaborated with other VHA program offices to standardize nursing practices and promote quality care for high-risk Veteran populations through the development and evaluation of evidence-based practice standards and dissemination of best nursing practices.

Seamless Interstate Practice

In 2023, ONS continues to lead the effort to establish national standards of practice (NSP) that will allow RNs, LPNs/LVNs, and CRNAs to move seamlessly throughout VHA to ensure the VHA nursing workforce can continue to meet the needs of Veterans.

VA's Top Clinical Priority

In 2023, collaboration with field-based nurse leaders to prevent Veteran suicide led to the development, piloting, training, and management of the VA Approved Acute Enterprise Standard (VAAES) Mental Health screening note as well as additional staff education, orientation, and training products.



Freedom Sings USA: Showcasing Hidden Strengths Through Storytelling

"You get gold records and platinum records, and you think, 'Wow, that's amazing.' Then you start working with Veterans, and you get a phone call in the middle of the night saying, 'Hey man, you saved my life.' Those records on the wall don't look so good anymore."

-DON GOODMAN, SONGWRITER AND CO-FOUNDER OF FREEDOM SINGS AND MULTIPLE GRAMMY AWARD NOMINEE



Don Goodman and Steven Dean, founders of Freedom Sings USA, at the VHA songwriter's retreat.

*I'll be the one to hold their hand,
I'll be the one who listens when all they
need's a friend,
And when you send your angels to call them home,
I'll be there.
They'll never die alone.*



Marvia Balfour-Coleman at Fort Knox Army Base, Kentucky, 1988

Marvia Balfour-Coleman, "A Nurse's Prayer"

Marvia Balfour-Coleman, MSN and Chief Nurse of Care in the Community at the Lieutenant Colonel Luke Weathers Jr. VA Medical Center in Memphis, Tennessee, is a Tennessee Army National Guard Veteran. Her experience of caring for Veterans during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic inspired her song.

*"It's my hope that nurses and all health care workers who cared for COVID-19 patients can see themselves in my song and their own experiences, because **my story is their story.**"*

- MARVIA BALFOUR-COLEMAN

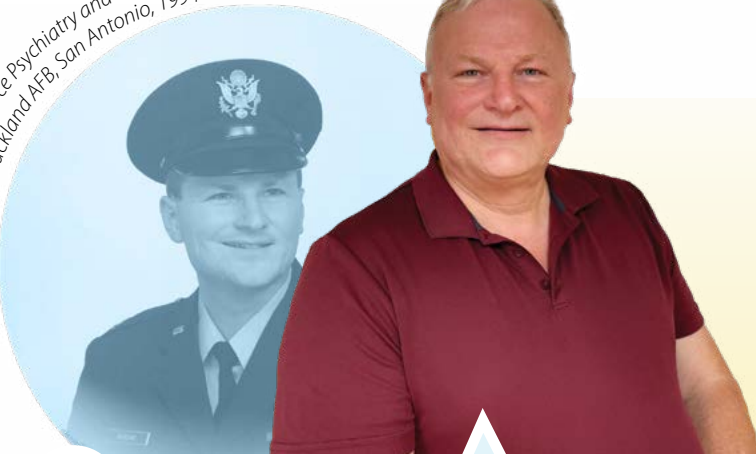
Just a girl at Paris Island
 Young, gung-ho, and green
 Taught me dang near everything
 'Bout bein' a part of a team
 Nighttime walking down these halls
 When it's more than I can stand
 That young Marine whispers in my ear
 Sister... yes you can.



Stephanie Leach, "Yes You Can"

Stephanie Leach, RN and MSN, Nurse Manager of Medical Surgical Telemetry Unit 4C at Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System in Little Rock, Arkansas, is a Veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. While serving during the COVID-19 pandemic, she guided her staff through the many challenges and hurdles presented to nurses during the crisis, which inspired her song.

Roland Sauerland, Air Force Psychiatry and Substance Abuse Nurse at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, 1994



I see you,
 I see your pain,
 I served too,
 I'm one of you.



"Throughout our country's wars and at peacetime, nurses have served in the military in one form or another. Veteran nurses have served other Veterans since the creation of the VA. I see all **my nurse colleagues continually go above and beyond** what they need for their job – that is the way."

-ROLAND SAUERLAND

Roland Sauerland, "The Forgotten"

Roland Sauerland, BSN, who serves in the Intensive Community Mental Health Recovery (ICMHR) program at the Audie L. Murphy Memorial VA Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, is a U.S. Air Force Veteran. He cares for Veterans living with PTSD who have chosen to move to remote areas around San Antonio. Sauerland says of his inspiration for the song: "By building that trust and checking in on them, they can feel that they are not forgotten."



Watch professional songwriters team up with Veteran VA nurses to help tell their stories through song in this powerful video.



Pillar 2



2023 Nursing Scholarships and Residency Programs

101 facilities have active RNTTP programs.

3,077 new graduate RNs have participated in the RNTTP program since 2019.

Up to **25%** of future VHA RNs will be hired as new graduates to establish and sustain a reliable pipeline of nursing personnel to meet Veterans' needs now and into the future.

More than **93%** of RNs were still with VA at the end of their first year.

Strengthening the Nursing Workforce

Employing more than 119,000 nurses, VHA is the nation's largest nursing employer and plays a vital role in Veteran care. Recognizing the nationwide nursing shortage, ONS and front-line nurses within VHA are proactively addressing this issue. Initiatives include streamlining onboarding, enhancing career mobility, and investing in top-tier research and evidence-based residency programs.

Important Work Around Recruitment and Retention

Developed as part of the Reduce Employee Burnout and Optimize Organizational Thriving (REBOOT) initiative, the 72/80 Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) was piloted in 2023. The schedule, which allows registered nurses to work 72 hours in two weeks instead of the traditional 80 hours, is available to help recruit and retain registered nurses by improving employee satisfaction, reduce commutes, provide greater continuity of care for Veterans and better patient outcomes, less sick leave use, and improved work-life balance with fewer workdays and extended time off.

Faces from the Field: Travel Nurse to the Rescue

The Salt Lake City VA Health Care System Integrated Practice Unit (IPU) was short-staffed with noticeable indications of staff burnout. When VA travel nurse Ryan Hoffman, RN, arrived to help, charge nurse Brent Tucker was not hopeful. How could one nurse make a difference? But Hoffman did just that. "He completely and immediately changed my view," said Tucker. "Not only was he competent in this new work setting, but he also immediately jumped in and relieved an immense weight from my shoulders, and our co-workers' as well."

The Transition of an RN

When newly licensed RNs transition from the classroom to clinical practice, it's critical for them to develop the skills and apply their knowledge to competent nursing practice within their education, training, and licensure levels. The Registered Nurse Transition to Practice (RNTTP) Residency Program guides new graduates through this progression with a 12-month program designed to prepare them with both confidence and competence to deliver quality patient care.



Ryan Hoffman has skateboard, will travel

IN 2023, THE ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULE (AWS) PILOT PROGRAM TOOK PLACE AT:



AND RESULTED IN:

IMPACT OF MINDFUL MONDAYS

Attendees include Health Technicians (HTs), Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs), LPNs, RNS, and NAs.

3,146 nursing personnel attended

4.9 average satisfaction score (Likert scale 1-5)

90% recommended the program to at least one other person

57%

experienced a reduction in anxiety

75%

reported it helped them be more productive

47%

indicated it helped them take better care of themselves

51%

reported that it helped them reset their workday

64%

reported better focus and mental clarity

69%

reported better stress management

Starting the Week Off Right

ONS works with nurses in the field to address burnout and enhance job satisfaction for VHA nurses. Consistent with VHA's Reduce Employee Burnout and Optimize Organizational Thriving (REBOOT) program, one of the many Whole Health activities nurses are invited to participate in weekly is Mindful Mondays, a chance to set a positive tone for the week, increase self-awareness, and help them manage the challenges and demands of their work more effectively.

Supporting Specialty Care

ONS partnered with the National Specialty Care Program Office (SCPO) to lead a Specialty Care Clinic Interdisciplinary Project Team (IPT) to identify a staffing model for specialty care. The team evaluated private-sector staffing models and recommended a specialty care staffing model. Evaluation metrics will consist of productivity, encounters per day, wait time for appointments, use of community care, provider satisfaction, and patient satisfaction to ensure the delivery of safe care.

Nurse Recruiters Learn New Skills

In July 2023, 40 VA Nurse Recruiters attended the National Association

for Health Care Recruitment (NAHCR) conference in Austin, Texas. NAHCR offered continuing education courses on change management, social media marketing, diversity, candidate sourcing, generational differences, legal updates, and more. A VA Nurse Recruiters Association (VANRA)-sponsored breakout session allowed VA Nurse Recruiters to discuss recruiting within the federal government, share best practices, and explore unique topics.

Explore Nursing Excellence with the ONS SharePoint Site

Nurses are invited to explore, connect, and thrive using the ONS SharePoint site, which provides information on all the programs, initiatives, priorities, and plans that ONS is leading. The SharePoint redesign has driven an explosion in stakeholder engagement, generating a more than 2,000% increase in the monthly average of unique visitors since the site launched in August 2022. Monthly averages top 5,000 unique visitors and more than 17,000 page views. The Nursing Qualifications site is one of the most popular, averaging about 3,000 views a month.

Legislation at Work for Nurses

Passed: Retention and Income Security Enhancement (R.A.I.S.E.) Act

- » Lifts VA pay caps for APRNs and RNs, allowing VA to offer more competitive salaries in specific areas of the country for nurses in highly competitive markets.

Proposed: Reimbursement of Continuing Professional/Medical Education for Full-Time Board-Certified PAs, APRNs, Pharmacists, and Pharmacy Technicians

- » Reimbursement for continuing professional education expenses up to \$1,000 per year for full-time board-certified Physician Assistants (PAs), APRNs, Pharmacists, and Pharmacy Technicians.

Proposed: Ensuring a Strong and Capable Nursing Workforce to Meet all VHA Missions

- » Establishes funding for up to 1,500 nursing resident positions annually and expands residency programs to address anticipated nursing staffing shortages by increasing the recruitment, preparation, and retention of nursing staff via formal nursing residency programs.



Freedom Sings USA: A Special Endeavor for All Involved

Veterans work alongside acclaimed professional songwriters to craft their songs. The talented and generous artists helped the Nurse Veterans bring not only their songs, but also their memories, to life.



Ramona Ross (L) works with songwriters Paul Tull and Irene Kelley to create her song.

The nurses, who are also military Veterans, gathered in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, right outside of Nashville, for a songwriting retreat. This quiet time allowed participants to reflect on their personal journeys, and with the help of dedicated songwriters, create their own masterpieces.



*"Hearing my song come together and the finished product was an emotional and heartfelt experience. As I listened, I was in awe of the story, almost forgetting it was about me. It all came rushing over me, and I was so proud and emotional about the story told and how it was about me, but that it could also be relatable to other Veterans. **We all share invisible scars.**"*

-LORETTA GORECKI

Christine Brooks



*Joined the Air Force out of high school,
Was sent to Myrtle Beach.
Built bombs, bullets, and missiles
At the time we were at peace.
But the Gulf War came calling,
My unit was deployed.
They weren't gonna let me go,
Until I made a little Christine noise.*

Christine Brooks, "Welcome Home"

Christine Brooks, an LPN at the Clarksville, Tennessee Community Based Outpatient Clinic, is a Veteran of the U.S. Air Force as well as Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. "What I thought would be most challenging was not challenging at all. That was finding something in my story worth telling. The easiest part was telling my story to Bill [Whyte, songwriter], and he was able to hear what I was saying."

*I have seen the gift of life enter into this world.
I have fought death's searching grasp for the soul
of a little girl.*

*I have sang Amazing Grace to those who passed beyond.
I pray they entered heaven accompanied by a song.
I've held the frail small hand until the final grasp.
These life points are changes and memories everlast.*



Hansel Moore

Hansel Moore, "Everlast"

Hansel Moore, an RN and facility telehealth coordinator for the Tennessee Valley Health Care System, is a Veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He served during the Cold War, a relatively peaceful time for active military service, which was the catalyst for his decision to become a nurse.

*"It is my observation that all nurses carry many 'battle scars' through their careers. Many of us don't realize or want to admit that what others might see as occupational hazards or just 'part of the job' can and does impact us as human beings. We often interact with people at their most vulnerable times. We witness and experience scenarios that most people cannot process. We 'pack it away' and move on, often to the detriment of our personal relationships. **There is no shame in seeking others to help process the weight that we carry.**"*

-HANSEL MOORE

Susan Pelz, Imagery Analyst for the 123rd Intelligence Group, after returning from deployment at the 480th Wing, 2003



*Every day your heart is broken
Every night pick up the pieces
Then come morning we do it all again.*

Susan Pelz, "Angels of Mercy"

Susan Pelz, a Nurse Manager at the John L. McClellan VA Medical Center in Little Rock, Arkansas, is a Veteran of the U.S. Air Force. "Nurses are tough physically and emotionally, as tough as many Veterans. However, no one can experience the level of stress for the period of time we did without it breaking us down," she says about nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We've traveled all over this country, writing with Veterans, and it is the single most fantastic thing I have ever been a part of in my life."

-DON GOODMAN



Are you a Veteran interested in participating in the Freedom Sings USA program, or a songwriter interested in sharing your talent? Visit freedomingsusa.org for more info!



Pillar 3

As of October 2023:

3 VA Days at annual ANCC Magnet Conference were held

456 Nurse Managers were in attendance

NMs earned between **4.0** and **7.5** Continuing Nursing Education Credits (CNE)

NMs scored VA Days **4.38** out of a 5-point Likert scale for satisfaction

IN 2023:

49 facilities had SimLEARN certifications:

- » **25** Basic (four newly-designated in 2023)
- » **15** Intermediate
- » **9** Advanced

Reimagining Lifelong Learning and Career Development

Nurses commit to lifelong learning, upholding the importance of staying up to date, broadening their expertise, and emerging as leaders in patient care. ONS wholeheartedly champions the idea that VHA nurses across diverse environments should enjoy accessible educational opportunities, leadership roles, and tailored pathways for professional growth, which broaden their career horizons. ONS also supports the fostering of an environment of intellectual challenge and pursuit to improve their practice and satisfaction with the profession.

Professional Growth Opportunities for Nurses

ONS understands that professional development is vital to maintaining high-quality patient care. It ensures the VHA nursing workforce stays current with medical advancements, promotes job satisfaction, reduces burnout, and fosters a culture of continuous improvement. The following are some of the training opportunities offered in 2023.

Nurse Manager Institute (NMI)

Offered by the American Organization of Nurse Leaders (AONL), NMI helps emerging Nurse Managers improve their skills as managers while providing the tools for career advancement.

VA-Day for Nurse Managers

ONS and nurses in the field expanded the Nurse Manager Training to include VA-Day, providing VA-specific needs-based training to Nurse Managers. Nurse Managers (NM) are the backbone of nursing in the field and are critical to the success of the nurses they oversee, the patients on the units and in clinics, and ensure we have a competent and confident nursing staff to meet the four VHA statutory missions.

Passport to Success

When new VHA Nurse Managers begin their work, they are supported with the Passport to Success Manual and the Training Management System (TMS) Course during the first 10-12 weeks in their new position.

Protected Time for Putting Knowledge into Action

The EBP Pilot Scholar Program team has developed a plan to advance EBP implementation. The program outlines a pilot process where nurses will receive dedicated time and resources for putting their evidence-based recommendations into practice.

Nurse Scientists Promote One of VA's Most Important Missions

Nurse Scientists played a key role in 2023 in discovering better, evidence-based ways to provide nursing care to Veterans. ONS believes the inclusion of Nurse Scientists helps promote nursing research and supports building a healthy work environment.



What is the Importance of Nursing Specialty Certifications?

Dr. Valerie Rodriguez-Yu, Associate Director, Patient Care Services/Nurse Executive at South Texas Veterans Healthcare System, speaks to the many reasons why certifications are important in this video.

Why Do Nurses Choose VA?

Watch Nurse Manager Sarah Lueger describe why she chose a career in nursing at VA.



Igniting Ideas

ONS hosts the monthly Nursing Science Collaborative Call that addresses various research topics. In addition, a Nurse Science Collaborative Monthly Call provides connections and education for VHA nurse scientists across the enterprise. The collaborative members have supported two multi-site studies and provided education on the NWSP and associated research opportunities.

Simulation Learning



The Milwaukee VAMC earned Intermediate SimLEARN certification in 2023.

Simulation leverages technology to enhance nurses' clinical skills while promoting and elevating safe patient practices. SimLEARN equips facilities for safe, tech-enabled learning, leading to national SimLEARN certification, better outcomes for Veterans, and excellence in health care. This peer-supported program allows nurses to teach SimLEARN to other nurses.

Focus on Excellence

The American Nursing Credentialing Center (ANCC) Magnet Recognition Program® and Pathway to Excellence® goes beyond honoring health care excellence – it celebrates facilities that are prioritizing nursing talent and empowering nurses to reach their full potential. Achieving these standards isn't about recognition. The importance from these recognitions directly correlates to improved patient outcomes, stability of nursing staff, and reliance on shared governance. In addition, Pathway-designated

Currently there are:

- » 3 VA Magnet Designated Facilities
- » 11 VA Pathway to Excellence Designated Facilities
- » 6 more on the Path to Magnet
- » Multiple facilities on the Path to Excellence

The Michael E. DeBakey VAMC Houston received the HX National Database of Nursing Quality Indicators (NDNQI)® Award for Outstanding Nursing Quality.

organizations are deemed the best place to work for nurses, with high nurse satisfaction and retention.

Turn to page two to see the names of the facilities redesignated as Pathway to Excellence.

Let's Get Certified!

The Let's Get Certified campaign encourages nurses to obtain specialty certifications to promote professional development. Workforce and Leadership and front-line nurses developed a toolkit in 2023 that includes video clips, infographics, slides, and posters to encourage nurses to take the next step.

The South Texas Veterans Health Care System has been a driving force for professional development and continuous nursing excellence. Thanks to their work, there has been an increase of 8.14% RN/APRNs in 2023, compared to 2022, which increased the system's certified nurses by 13.6%. The more people working at a facility who are professionally board certified, the more likely that facility will be to achieve Magnet and Pathway recognitions.



Faces from the Field: Nurse Practitioner Pioneer Dr. Loretta Ford

Dr. Loretta Ford, a World War II Veteran, is the co-founder of the nurse practitioner profession. Watch this living legend describe her experiences creating the nurse practitioner role here.

Champions for Veterans

Three hundred RNs and social workers who serve as CCICM Co-Champions or Lead Coordinators have the chance to prepare to become certified Case Managers. This professional development opportunity will allow VHA to increase the number of certified Case Managers working with Veterans to provide critical services to those Veterans with moderate to complex care needs.

Take a Deep Breath

The Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) recognized Gulf Coast VA Health Care System

with a Gold Level Go Clear Award. This honor recognizes health care facilities who have committed to eliminating hazardous smoke from its surgical procedures.

Showcasing Innovation

The ONS-sponsored virtual poster conference allowed participants and audiences to learn about new nursing practices grounded in scientific research and evidence practices. The 2023 winning posters came from Durham VA Medical Center, Eastern Colorado Healthcare System, and South Texas Veterans Healthcare System. Congratulations to the winning teams!

A Guide for Nurses Interested in Leadership

Are you a VHA nurse ready to begin your leadership career journey? The VHA Career Leadership Development Guide can help you and your supervisor discuss your development and explore leadership roles.



Freedom Sings USA: The Power of Music Healing Through Song



“And when the guitar comes out, and we start playing music, I can’t really describe it. It’s a spiritual kind of thing.”

-STEVE DEAN, SINGER/SONGWRITER,
CO-FOUNDER OF FREEDOM
SINGS, 6 BILLBOARD
#1 SONGS



Christine Brooks, LPN, watches as Bill Whyte performs her song “Welcome Home.”

James Adams



*Never dreamed I’d be a nurse one day
Spending my life with the heroes
Sharing prayers and stories at the VA
Never dreamed that I’d end up here
But Lord knows I’ve been blessed by my career.*



“If you would have told the 13-year-old me one day you’re gonna’ play in rock bands, become a soldier, and later go on to be a nurse, I would assume you were confusing me with someone else. Dr. Seuss was right with the whole, ‘Oh, the places you’ll go!’

-JAMES ADAMS

James Adams, "Blessed By My Career"

James Adams, an LPN at the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Veteran’s Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, is a former U.S. Army Cavalry Scout. James plays the guitar, bass guitar, drums, sings, and writes songs as a hobby.

No one knew my darker side of life
That he would steal my dignity, late one
Friday night.
He went on to get his silver bird
I was pushed aside, made to hide, no one
would take my word
'cause I'm just a girl.



Ramona Ross

Ramona Ross, "Just a Girl"

Ramona Ross, RN, BSN currently serves as the Nurse Manager of the Referral Coordination Initiative and is a Veteran of the U.S. Army. "The topic of my story is sensitive, and it took me years to acknowledge openly that I was a victim of sexual assault. But the songwriters I worked with make the process easier than I would ever have imagined," she shares.

"I still find it difficult to believe writing this song accomplished something years of therapy had not. While I have always credited VA with helping me regain my emotional footing and overcoming the trauma of those experiences, I always felt I lived in a shadow. I had no reason to be ashamed of what I had experienced, but that is what I felt. Listening to the song, **I felt like that final weight had been lifted off my shoulders.**"

-RAMONA ROSS



Irene Kelley (R) performs Ramona Ross's song "Just a Girl"

Kristine Sorto



People don't know the look in the eyes of a soldier
taking his last breath.
People don't know the thunder of a bomb.
People don't know the pressure of time running medic
supplies to prevent death.
People don't know the meaning of adapt
and overcome.

Kristine Sorto, "People Don't Know"

Kristine Sorto, an LPN at Alvin C. York VA Medical Center in Tennessee, is a Veteran of the U.S. Army, where she served 24 years. In 2008, she deployed to Baghdad and Al-Kut, Iraq, and served with Ibn Sina Hospital.



Pillar 4

Inspiring an Industry-Leading Culture

VHA nurses are dedicated to serving the nation's Veterans and make a profound impact through their tireless and selfless care. To bolster nurses in their mission, VHA is committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable culture. The goal is to provide competitive benefits and compensation, surpass private-sector standards, and develop offer a shared-governance model that empowers all nurses in their exceptional work.

Uplifting Nurses' Voices

Across the VA, it is well known that nurses have a leading role as the backbone of health care. The National Nursing Practice Council (NNPC) knows the voices of nurses are essential for the well-being of Veterans, nurses, and the nursing profession. Using a shared governance approach, front-line nurses are given a say in their work, which leads to better patient care and fosters a healthier, more sustainable health care system overall.



Same Mission, New I-DEA

To advance an inclusive environment that values and supports the diverse communities we serve—employees, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors—and cultivate equitable access to care, benefits, and services for all, VA has embraced making inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (I*DEA) part of its culture. Nursing represents a diverse workforce with many participants in related activities across the enterprise.



The First Nationwide Nurse Honor Guard

On May 12, 2023, the Hampton VA Health Care System held the first annual VA Nurse Honor Guard Memorial ceremony to recognize VA nursing professionals who have served honorably and passed away. The "Final Call to Duty" ceremony has a Florence Nightingale Lamp Lighting presentation, bell ringing, white rose ceremony, and certificate of service table display with a commemorative wreath arrangement to honor all Hampton Nurses who had their final call before the induction of the Nurse Honor Guard.

Taking a Page Out of the Playbook

The Shared Governance Playbook offers resources to improve and sustain joint decision-making in health care. It includes strategies, tools and processes to standardize work, assess competencies and measure progress. This valuable resource supports team members in building and continually improving shared interprofessional governance across organizations and systems.

Tuskegee: A Century of Service to Veterans

One century ago, a U.S. Department of Treasury hospitalization committee found it was almost impossible for 300,000 Black Veterans to secure proper health care in the segregated South. The U.S. Congress authorized the construction of a hospital in the South solely for the care of Black Veterans, to be built adjacent to the Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), with the first all-Black medical staff, including nursing personnel. Throughout 2023, Central Alabama VA Health Care System recognized the historical and cultural role of its Tuskegee Campus by hosting several events, including community-wide expos and the Tuskegee

100th Centennial Jubilee at Tuskegee University. The health care system also shared historical images on social media and implemented many other activities to highlight a century of service to those special Veterans.

Faces from the Field: Nurse Practitioner Shines a Light on Disparities in Cancer Care

Grace Cullen, DNP, FNP-BC, AOCNP, PMGT-BC, FPCN, a hematology/oncology and palliative care/hospice certified registered nurse practitioner at the Detroit VA Health Care System, was interviewed for an article by the Oncology Nursing Society on the topic of disability disparities in cancer care. Along with Dr. Lisa L. Lezzoni, MD, of the Harvard University Medical School, Dr. Cullen advocated for the more than one billion individuals worldwide with some type of disability who often face higher rates of cancer, social determinants of health disadvantages, and greater health disparities. As discussed in the article, these individuals are also more likely to have risk factors associated with a cancer diagnosis and require close care that accommodates their disability.

Enhancing Excellence in Nursing

The National APRN Practice Program serves as the voice for APRNs across VHA and provides APRN practice consultation to VHA program offices, VISNs, and VA health care systems/medical centers leadership. The National APRN Practice Council, within this program, advises field APRNs on elevating advanced practice nursing through leadership, collaboration, and communication. Notable 2023 achievements:

- » Conducted 2 National APRN town halls and 3 National APRN professional development series calls, each averaging 400 to 800 participants. Discussions center around questions from field nurses.
- » Facilitated 6 new local VA health care system/medical center APRN councils.
- » Produced a new APRN qualification standards rollout training video for the field.
- » Updated VHA directives and policies related to APRN practice.
- » Created five additional specialty interest groups (SIG) in Dermatology, Cardiology, Pain, and Pulmonary, bringing the total to 11, to provide opportunities for networking among colleagues, sharing best practices, and developing resources applicable to various specialties.
- » Developed standardized APRN functional statements.
- » Developed and implemented, in collaboration with Workforce Management Consulting (WMC), new APRN assignment codes.
- » Increased bidirectional communication between APRNs at the local level with the National APRN Council through implementing continuing education (CE) opportunities, monthly headache management webinars, and APRN mapping and productivity educational sessions.



2022 ONS ANNUAL REPORT WINS AWARD

The Hermes Creative Awards, one of the world's oldest and largest creative competitions, recognized the 2022 ONS Annual Report with a gold medal for bringing the efforts of the VHA nursing workforce to life through creativity and best practices.



VHA Nursing by the Numbers 2023

VA is the **largest employer** of nursing personnel in the nation, with **119,388 nurses**, a **7.7% increase** from last year.

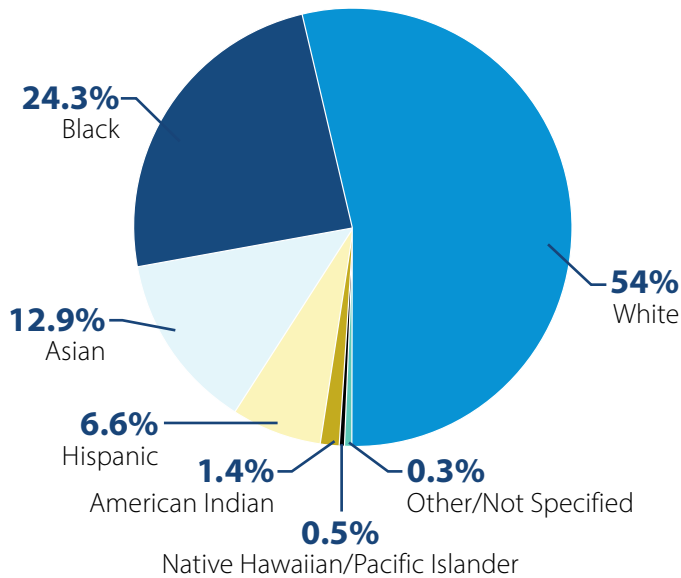
79,616 Registered Nurses **15,460** LPNs/LVNs **14,174** NAs **8,705** CNPs **1,173** CRNAs **257** CNSs **3** CNMs

RNs were **ranked #1** and LPNs were **ranked #3** among VHA top clinical shortage occupations.

Advanced practice registered nurses (APRN) include four levels of advanced nursing practice:

CNP, CNS, CRNA, and CNM.

VHA Nursing Workforce Diversity Demographics



In 2023, FACs developed **ranked various evidence-based products and resources** for use by nursing staff across the enterprise, such as clinical practice guidelines, educational offerings, and documentation tools.

6.2% of the nursing workforce is comprised of employees working with a disability.

13.1% of the VHA nursing workforce are Veterans.

Supporting Nurses Working at the Point of Care

CPP comprises 13 Clinical Nurse Advisors who serve as subject matter experts in their area of practice and provide oversight to 13 Field Advisory, which consists of more than 140 front-line staff with specialization in the areas of:

1. Cardiology
2. Community Living Center (CLC)
3. Critical Care and Inpatient Medicine
4. Emergency Department
5. Geriatrics & Extended Care
6. Mental Health
7. Metabolic Syndrome & Diabetes
8. Oncology
9. Pain Management
10. Perioperative
11. Polytrauma/ Spinal Cord Injury/ Rehabilitation
12. Pressure Injury Management & Prevention
13. Primary Care

Nurses at Work

- » 6,719,370 unique patients were treated in 2023
- » 87,458,424 Outpatient visits

Travel Corps (TC)

- » Travel Corps field nursing staff spent 145,469.25 hours supplementing staffing support.
- » 75 Travel Corps nurses support the field daily.



VAAES Health Factor Documents

VA Approved Acute Enterprise Standard (VAAES) health factor documents ensure consistent, first-class health care for Veterans while setting standards for critical medical decisions, and for medical research and quality review.

IN 2023:

» **2,600** unique VAAES Health Factors were captured **434 million times.**

» **444,740** admission assessments

» **5.41 million** shift assessments

» **4.46 million** frequent assessments

» **714,560** IV assessments and inserts

» **873,700** oral care assessments

» **5.14 million** skin assessments

» **17.1 million** total assessments

WERE COMPLETED!

A Well-Educated Workforce

61% of nursing personnel have a higher education, including:



U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Nurse Officers

VHA USPHS Nurse Officers at VA are vital to delivering high-quality health care services to Veterans and providing comprehensive and compassionate care to those who have served. Their roles and responsibilities vary based on their assignments and the specific needs of the VA health care system.

In 2023:

35 USPHS Nurse Officers were detailed to VA:

» **20** RNs » **15** ARNPs

- › 1 Adult-Gerontology CNP
- › 1 Dermatology CNP
- › 9 Family CNPs
- › 1 Women's Health CNP
- › 1 Psychiatric Mental Health CNP
- › 2 CRNAs

Good News About Decreasing Nursing Burnout!

The 2023 All Employee Nursing Survey measures exhaustion, burnout symptoms, and overall satisfaction by asking key questions of the nursing workforce.



- » **3.15% increase** in nursing satisfaction scores.
- » **8% increase** in nursing engagement.



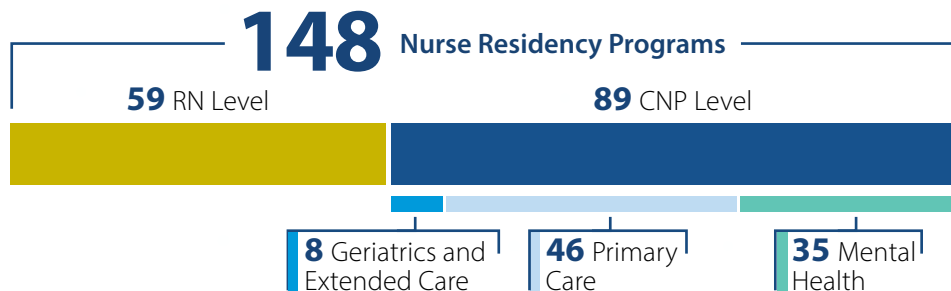
- » **8.9% decrease** in nursing exhaustion, the lowest rate among nurses in three years.
- » **21.8% decrease** in nurses reporting "high burnout."

Nurses who consider VHA the best place to work **improved by 7%.**

VA RN job satisfaction **improved by 3.2%.**

Robust Nurse Residency Programs Lead to New Hires

In 2022-2023, the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) conducted:



23 new resident positions were offered as part of the Geriatrics and Extended Care Nurse Residency pilot program.



Cherished Memories: Nurses Month 2023

VA proudly joined the American Nurses Association in celebrating Nurses Month in May 2023. To recognize and celebrate our extraordinary nursing professionals who ensure the nation's Veterans receive the highest quality of care, ONS facilitated events, speakers, clinical programming, films, and Whole Health sessions. VAMCs across the country joined in to celebrate nurses and hosted parties and other special events to say thank you.



Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, Alabama

The Nurses Month Celebrations

The Nurses Month celebrations garnered historic nursing recognition and engagement, including:

- » **the largest audience in 156 years** of VHA Nursing for 50+ events/sessions
- » **43,000+ engagements** on social media, live events, and videos
- » **600% increase** in ONS website traffic
- » **1,800 views** of evidence-based practice and nursing research

VA SECRETARY'S AWARDS IN NURSING EXCELLENCE were held in May. Turn to page 30 to read about the honorees!



Dr. Strawn (R) celebrates Nurses Month with nurses and staff, including Associate Director, Patient Care Services, Teresa Tungseth (L) and Nurse Manager Nancy Murphy, at Minneapolis VAMC.



A Message of Thanks

Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shareef Elnahal, Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer Dr. Chris Saslo, and Executive Director of the Office of Nursing Services and Deputy Chief Nursing Officer Dr. Jennifer Strawn recognize the dedication and hard work of VA nurses in this video message.



West Palm Beach Medical Center, Florida



Daytona Beach VA Clinic, Florida



San Francisco VA Healthcare System, California



Orlando VA Healthcare System, Florida



Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, Alabama



VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, Nevada



VA Eastern Kansas Healthcare System, Kansas



VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System, Ohio



Celebrating Success

In 2023, VA nurses garnered numerous accolades for their dedication to advancing nursing practice, pioneering life-saving innovations, displaying exceptional leadership, and demonstrating acts of kindness. While we can't list every recognition, here's a glimpse of VA nurses' remarkable daily impact. Congratulations to all for these prestigious honors and unwavering commitment to exceptional Veteran care!

VA Secretary's Awards in Nursing Excellence

Christian Briggs, RN
VA Richmond Healthcare System, Richmond, Virginia

Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing in the Registered Nurse/Staff Role

For reducing complications from Foley catheter insertion by identifying the need for more accurate insertion and implementing a new method.

Sonya Arnold, RN, MSN
Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, Bay Pines, Florida

Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing in the Registered Nurse in an Expanded Role

For increasing oral care compliance to greater than 90% while decreasing pneumonia cases to zero.

Krystle M. O'Shaughnessy, LPN
Manchester VA Health Care System, Manchester, New Hampshire

Secretary's Award for Excellence in the Licensed Practical Nurse Role
For increasing patient enrollment in telehealth by 24%.

Kaelen Ferrazzo, HCT
Iowa City VA Health Care System, Iowa City, Iowa

Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing in the Health Care Technician Role

For providing both echo and vascular imaging during a staffing shortage and preventing service gaps.

Carrie Hensley, MSN, Hershel "Woody" Williams VA Medical Center, Huntington, West Virginia

Secretary's Award for the Advancement of Nursing Programs in the Nurse Executive Role

For her work in keeping her facility in the top 5 nationally as a best place to work and top five in overall quality based on VHA all-employee surveys (AES).

Kevin M. Forrest, FACHE
Manchester VA Health Care System, Manchester, New Hampshire

Secretary's Award for the Advancement of Nursing Programs in the Nurse Executive Role

For his work recapturing community care to his facility by improving the Veteran experience; he offered high-quality care with quicker access times than provided in the community, resulting in a 48% recapture of orthopedic care.



Krystle O'Shaughnessy receives the Excellence in the Licensed Practical Nurse Role from VA Secretary Denis McDonough at the annual Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing in May 2023. In attendance were Dr. Saslo, Dr. Shereef Elnahal, Under Secretary for Health of VHA, and Dr. Strawn.



CHRISTIAN BRIGGS



SONYA ARNOLD



KRYSTLE M. O'SHAUGHNESSY



KAELEN FERRAZZO



CARRIE HENSLEY



KEVIN M. FORREST

A Professional Highpoint

The American Academy of Nursing (AAN) inducted 5 VA nurses into the **2023 Class of Fellows**. The inductees were recognized for their substantial, sustained, and outstanding impact on health and health care at the academy's annual Health Policy Conference in October 2023.

Congratulations to the VA nurses who received this distinguished acknowledgment!

Dr. Catherine Battaglia, Ph.D., RN
| Department of Veterans Affairs Eastern Colorado Healthcare System

Dr. Chien Chen, MSN, RN, PMH-BC, NPD-BC, NEA-BC, DNP,
| Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office

Dr. Margo Halm, Ph.D. RN, NEA-BC
| VA Portland Health Care System

Dr. Danilo Lovinaria, DNP, MBA, APRN, CRNA, CHSE, FNP, FAANA, FAAN
| Minneapolis Veterans Affairs

Dr. Heidi Maloni, Ph.D., RN, ANP-BC, CNRN, MSCN, FAAN
| DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center



CATHERINE BATTAGLIA



CHIEN CHEN



MARGO HALM



DANILO LOVINARIA



HEIDI MALONI

Exemplary Health Care Leaders

Two VA nurse practitioners were selected as distinguished **Fellows of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (FAANP)**. Dr. Kristin Kopelson, DNP, ACNP-BC, FNP-BC, FAANP, and Dr. Karen Williams, DNP, FNP-BC, AQH, FAANP, are recognized with this great honor for their positive and profound impact on national health, joining an elite group of CNPs.

Forging a Path for CNPs

In recognition of a lifelong career that has had a profound and enduring impact on the profession and the CNP role, Dr. Cathy St. Pierre, Ph.D., APRN, FNP-BC, FAANP received the **2023 Fellows of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (FAANP) Legacy Award**. She has devoted her career to advancing the role and profession of CNPs through professional, academic, and volunteer pursuits nationally and internationally.

VA Nurse Named Revolutionary Leader in Evidence-Based Practice

Dr. Sheila Sullivan, PhD, RN, EBP-C, Director of REA for ONS, was named one of **"30 Revolutionary Leaders in 30 Years"** by the National EBP Conference. Dr. Sullivan was recognized for her long-standing support of and visionary leadership in EBP and for developing and implementing a national EBP educational program in VA.

AACN Circle of Excellence Award

Danoris A. Chinn MSN, RN, CNL, EBP-C, an Army Veteran with 30 years of nursing service with the VA North Texas Health Care System, has been honored with the **American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) Circle of Excellence Award**. The nurses who received this award are noted for their solution-oriented approaches to challenges, including reducing health care-associated infection rates, improving the work environment, and helping their organizations and communities respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.



KRISTIN KOPELSON



KAREN WILLIAMS



CATHY ST. PIERRE



SHEILA SULLIVAN



DANORIS CHINN

Celebrating Success



LARA PABLO



LESLIE FLYNN

National Recognition for Two VA CNAs

At the 2023 National Association of Health Care Assistants (NAHCA) annual Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Fest, two VA CNAs, both from the Hampton VA Medical Center, were honored with national recognition. Lara Pablo, serving Veterans in the emergency department, was recognized with the coveted **“Hospital CNA of the Year” award**. Leslie Flynn, a 30-plus-year employee of VA, was recognized with the **“Outstanding Attitude” award** for her positive and personable approach to Veteran care.



KATIE LUNNING RECEIVING THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

VA Nurse Awarded Distinguished Flying Cross

Major Katie Lunning, RN and MSN, an Intensive Care Unit Nurse Manager at the VA Central Iowa Health Care System, became the first Air National Guard Flight Nurse to be presented the **Distinguished Flying Cross Medal** for her service during the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan. Katie supported the Minnesota Air National Guard as an air transport nurse. “We were the first Critical Care Air Transport (CCATT) Team after the suicide bombing, so we got in, and we got to the hospital, and we worked with the physicians on site, and we took out as many patients that we could handle safely, and we flew them to Germany,” Lunning said.



NANCY CATALAN



GARRET EISEN



KAYLA WEBB



HOLLY TENAGLIA

Life-Saving Encounter

When Nancy Catalan, BSN, RN, Clinical Nurse Educator with the VA Bay Pines Health Care System, arrived home after work one day to find a golf cart in her driveway, with a man starting to lose consciousness. Nancy performed CPR for almost 7 minutes before help arrived. EMTs were able to resuscitate him, and he was released after surgery. She credits her participation in the low-dose, high-frequency CPR training, Resuscitation Quality Improvement (RQI), the American Heart Association's gold standard in CPR training.

VA Nurse Celebrates 50 Years of Service

As a young Army medic, Garret Eisen admired the nurses with whom he came in contact, who inspired him to pursue a career in nursing. Garret not only served Veterans at the Edward Hines VA Hospital as an RN for 50 years but also served for 24 years as a nurse in the U.S. Army Reserves, retiring in 2005 as a Lieutenant Colonel.

LPN Awarded Federal Woman of the Year

The 2023 Beckley VA Health Care System annual **Federal Woman of the Year award** ceremony honored Kayla Webb, an LPN serving Veterans through the Home-Based Primary Service Line. Described by her colleagues as always smiling, optimistic, and extraordinarily approachable, Kayla says, “I walk a little taller knowing that I help care for our nation's heroes.”

VA Nurse Named to Young Leaders Program

Holly Tenaglia, DNP, APRN, AGCNS-BC, ONC, and Clinical Nurse Educator at the VA San Diego Health Care System, has been recognized by the Oncology Nursing Society as one of 7 member leaders under age 40 who represent diverse oncology nursing backgrounds from around the world.



VISN CNOs met with ONS leadership in April 2023. First row (l-r): Tracy Weistreich, Acting Deputy Executive Director, Clinical Operations, Office of Nursing Services, Clinical Operations; Jennifer Strawn, Executive Director, Office of Nursing Services; Bailey Wells, Acting Deputy Executive Director, Office of Nursing Services, Business Operations; Aaron Arbogast, on behalf of VISN 5 CNO, Second row (l-r): Kay Kiesler, VISN 9 CNO, Jennifer Melvin-Pifer, on behalf of VISN 22 CNO, Shavetta Williams, VISN 12 CNO, Loretta Eleuterius, VISN 16 CNO, LaTrouna Tobias, VISN 7 CNO, Third row (l-r): Toby Underwood, VISN 15 CNO, Amy Gartley, VISN 1 CNO, Beverly Duncklee, on behalf of VISN 2 CNO, Lisa Shear, VISN 6 CNO, Barbara Teal, VISN 10 CNO, Valerie Rodriguez-Yu, Acting VISN 17 CNO, Angela Brothers, VISN 19 CNO, Denise Boehm, VISN 5 CNO, and Maisha Moore, VISN 21 CNO

Chief Nursing Officers: Essential Partners to Nurses in the Field

At VA, Chief Nursing Officers (CNOs) serve as advocates, leaders, and facilitators, creating a standardized, conducive environment for nurses to provide high-quality patient care while advancing nurses in their careers. Their role is instrumental in improving the overall well-being of nursing professionals and ensuring optimal Veteran outcomes.

Stabilizing the Nursing Workforce

VHA has seen the historically highest growth rate in 20 years, thanks in part to the work done by VISN CNOs around retention.



“The VISN CNO has been an advocate for recruitment and retention of nursing personnel, especially in light of the nursing shortage. We have encouraged the use of the 3Rs, flexibilities such as 72/80, alternate work schedules, REBOOT measures to decrease burnout, and an increase in our nursing pipeline through training or student programs and strengthening our relationships with academic affiliates. Nursing is crucial to the care of our Veterans, and it is of great importance that we recruit the best talent and retain our phenomenal staff.”

-VISN 12 CNO SHAVETTA WILLIAMS

Report Images: VA's Diverse Nursing Workforce

The 2023 ONS Annual Report depicts photographs of current front-line VA nurses because all the achievements noted throughout this report are the result of the nursing workforce. Wherever VA nurses serve, they all have one thing in common: providing the highest quality of care to Veterans while advancing nursing and transforming health care.

We want to thank the following for assistance in obtaining images for this report:

- » Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, Florida, Medical Media Services
- » Birmingham VA Health Care System, Alabama, Public Affairs and Medical Media
- » VA Caribbean, Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands, Office of Communications
- » VA Rocky Mountain VISN 19 Creative Task Force (CreaTF)
- » Southern Arizona VA Health Care Systems, Medical Media

We'd also like to thank all the facilities who submitted photos from their Nurses Month celebrations. We hope to see more in 2024!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE 2023 ONS ANNUAL REPORT TEAM

We want to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the 2023 ONS Annual Report Team. Their sense of purpose is at work on each page, as they went above and beyond to recognize the hard work of VA nurses across the enterprise to create excellence in the care of Veterans. We offer sincere gratitude and thank the many staff who are too numerous to name individually, who contributed to the development and production of this report. #VAGratitude





TO VHA NURSES

Not only do you have exceptional clinical expertise, you also bring humanity and empathy to the forefront of VA health care. Your unwavering dedication and selflessness are a daily reminder of the noblest aspects of the nursing profession. You have made a difference in the lives of countless Veterans, and your work inspires hope and healing in all whose lives you touch.

THANK YOU!

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration

