



SAVAHCS Director's Report

Jennifer S. Gutowski, MHA, FACHE
Director

December 2024

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Hot Topics

Message from the Director

As the holiday season approaches, I extend my warmest wishes to our dedicated community partners, our brave Veterans, their cherished families, our selfless Veteran caregivers, and our hardworking staff at the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System.

Your unwavering commitment to serving our nation's heroes is truly inspiring. Together, we strive to provide the highest quality care and support to our Veterans, ensuring they receive the respect and gratitude they so richly deserve. May this holiday season bring you joy, peace, and renewed strength as we continue our mission of honoring those who have served.

Happy Holidays!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Gutowski".

Jennifer S. Gutowski, MHA, FACHE
CEO/Director
Southern Arizona VA Health Care System



SAVAHCS Diversity Day

This event is an opportunity to celebrate our diverse community with cultural music, delicious food, and great company. Join us on Friday, December 13, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Rose Garden on main campus.

Prioritizing Patient Safety and Outcomes Through Facility Improvement

Pardon our dust as we expand and renovate the Emergency Department (ED). The beginning stages of the construction project have started. The main walk-in entrance to the ED will be relocated during construction in the same vicinity as the previous entrance. Please follow the signs posted.

Get Your Flu Shot

Flu and COVID vaccinations are available at the medical center or in one of our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC). You're encouraged to get yours today. The flu is a serious but preventable disease. Arizona's flu season lasts from October through April. A yearly flu shot is the best way to lower your chance of getting the flu. We want to make flu shots available in a way that is easy and safe for you.

When visiting the SAVAHCS for your flu shot, please remember not to come if you are feeling sick, exhibiting signs or symptoms of COVID-19, or have recently been in contact with someone who has a confirmed case of COVID-19. This precaution helps ensure the safety of all patients and staff. Additionally, we ask that you wear a shirt that allows easy access to your upper arm, close to your shoulder, to facilitate a smooth vaccination process. Your health and safety are our top priorities as we work to provide accessible flu vaccinations during the flu season.

You may get your flu shot during a scheduled appointment or at the times and locations below:

Flu Shots for main campus in Tucson:

- **Face-to-Face Flu Shots:**
 - Available during scheduled clinic appointments in primary care clinics, specialty clinics, and hemodialysis unit.
 - Walk-ins at the Immunization Clinic, Building 80 South
 - Monday through Friday, (except for Federal Holidays), 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.

All Community Based Outpatient Clinics will be providing Flu vaccines during clinic appointments, can be scheduled by appointment, and will accommodate walk-ins during business hours.

Casa Grande CBOC (7 a.m. – 5 p.m.)
1876 E Sabin Drive #14, Bldg. A
Casa Grande, AZ 85122

Northwest Tucson CBOC (7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.)
3920 W Linda Vista Blvd
Tucson, Az 85742

Sierra Vista CBOC (6:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)
101N Coronado Dr. #A
Sierra Vista, AZ 85635

Safford CBOC (8 a.m. – 4 p.m.)
355 N 8th Ave
Safford, AZ 85546

Yuma CBOC (7 a.m. – 5 p.m.)
3111 S 4th Ave
Yuma, AZ 85364

SE CBOC (6:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)
7395 S Houghton Rd. #129
Tucson, AZ 85747

Green Valley CBOC (6:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)
380 West Vista Hermosa Drive. # 140
Green Valley, AZ 85614

Don't let the flu get the best of you! Protect yourself and your loved ones. Get your flu shot now.

My HealthVet on VA.gov Transition

The VA's patient portal, [My HealthVet](#), is moving to [VA.gov](#) one tool at a time. With the new **My HealthVet on VA.gov** portal, Veterans will have a more secure, single online location to manage their health care and other VA benefits and services. As each new version of a My HealthVet tool is completed, Veterans are testing it and sharing their feedback prior to the tool being moved permanently to the portal on [VA.gov](#).

If you or the Veterans you serve have questions about this change, please call the SAVAHCS Virtual Health Resource Center at (520) 629-1713 or send an email to TucsonVHRC@va.gov.

Volunteers Needed

The Center for Development and Civic Engagement is recruiting volunteers for various positions throughout the facility. Come show your support for Veterans by volunteering in one of our many opportunities:

- Ambassador Patient Transportation (Help escort Veterans to their appointments)
- Van Drivers from Yuma or Casa Grande to our main campus in Tucson
- In-Home Visitor Program Volunteers/Compassionate Contact Corp
- Blind Rehab Recreation Activities Assistants
- Chaplain Office Assistant
- Concierge Information desk
- Comfort Cart Attendant (Bring comfort items to inpatients.)
- Van Drivers to provide local transportation for our Blind Rehab Veterans
- Emergency Department Assistant to charge nurse on duty (Open 24/7)
- HUD/VASH & Homeless Administrative Assistant
- Primary Care Patient Administrative Assistant (mailings)
- Yoga instructors (please inquire for specifics)

For more information, please email TucsonCDCE@va.gov or contact our Volunteer On-Boarding Specialist, Kristina Blake, at (520) 629-1822 or email kristina.blake@va.gov.

VA Health Care available to Thousands of Southern Arizona Veterans

VA announced that all Veteran who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military, at home or abroad, will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care beginning March 5, 2024. This means that all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11 will be eligible to enroll without first applying for VA benefits.

Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States will also be eligible to enroll, in one of the largest-ever expansions of Veteran health care (va.gov).

Whole Health Efforts at SAVAHCS

Whole Health is VA's approach to care that supports the Veteran's or individual's health and well-being. This means the health care team develops a personalized health plan based on the Veteran's values, needs, and goals., and what's important to them.

We offer self-help skills and support to make the changes the Veteran wants through: [Mindful Awareness](#), [Moving the Body](#), [Personal Development](#), [Nutrition](#), [Spirit & Soul](#), [Power of the Mind](#) and more.

We're actively spreading the word so that more Veterans are aware and enroll in these services.

For more information about Whole Health classes and resources, Veterans can contact SAVAHCS at 520-792-1450, extension 1-4971. They can also connect with health care teams via telephone or video appointments and utilize MyHealthVet for routine healthcare needs.

Community Engagements & Partnerships



[943rd Rescue Group Family Day](#) Hosted our outreach team along with 30 community providers assisting Veterans and their families with eligibility, suicide prevention, disability claims, and other community resources – November 2.



[162nd Wing Air National Guard Family Day Event](#) Was enjoyed by our outreach team. Their attendance provided resources on whole health, suicide prevention, HUD-VASH, eligibility, and identification card renewal – November 3.



[SAVAHCS Veterans Week](#) Was celebrated by leadership and staff with patients and volunteers. The weeklong activities gave an opportunity to recognize and honor our nations' heroes – November 5.



Council Member Richard Fimbres Donated over 4700 Veterans Day cards from local schools within his Ward 5 district to honor Veterans here at the Tucson VA main campus – November 8.



Tucson Veterans Day Parade Showcased a SAVAHCS PACT Act-themed float in the parade honoring all those Veterans who served during Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Desert Calm – November 11.



Director Jennifer Gutowski was an honored guest at the **American Legion Morgan McDermott Post 7**. Ms. Gutowski met with the Arizona State Commander Manny Beltran and the local Post Commander and discussed how to better support Veterans and get them enrolled in the VA health care system – November 11.



SAVAHCS Outreach Team Attended the Pima Community College Veteran Day Celebration, the Oro Valley Church of the Nazarene's Veterans Breakfast, and the Rockin 4 Heroes Concert. These events honored Veterans, services members, Gold Star family members and first responders for their service. The team provided information and resources to Veterans and their families – November 11.



Sierra Vista Community-Based Outpatient Clinic Staff Participated in the Sierra Vista Veterans Day Parade. The staff showed community spirit and honored our Sierra Vista Veterans in attendance – November 11.



Lung Cancer Awareness Month Was celebrated by patients and staff. Those in attendance were educated on the importance of lung cancer screening and how early detections is key to improving survival rates – November 15.



Wounded Warrior Regiment Regional Representative Met with staff from social work service and executive leadership team to discuss important topics related to care coordination and transitional assistance for injured Marines. The Wounded Warrior Regiment assists injured Marines with their transition to civilian life as a Marine Corps initiative – November 18.



Swan Lake Estates Red Hats Donated clothing and various hygiene items from their community to assist the Veterans in our Homeless Program and HUD VASH – November 19.



Traditional Way Workshop Was held at the Tucson VA. The purpose of the training was to increase VA staff awareness and sensitivity to Native American culture. Also, its impact on effective healthcare delivery through the eyes of the Native American Veteran – November 19.



30 Walmart Employees Came together to visit our Veterans. They generously donated 240 goodie bags and additional items for our inpatient comfort cart, benefiting our inpatient, resident, and outpatient Veterans – November 19.



Sun City Oro Valley Homeowners Came together and donated shelf-stable food items for our food insecure Veterans. This is their 3rd year partnering with us to support the Patriot Pantry and Veterans they assist – November 20.



Karen Herhold & Friends Donated over 192lbs of dog food, cat food and treats for SAVAHCS Homeless program. The Pet Food Distribution program ensures that no Veteran will have to choose between caring for their pets and their own well-being. – November 20.



Transgender Day of Remembrance Honored the lives of those in the transgender community who were lost to violence and hate. Transgender Day of Remembrance is a time to reflect on the importance of inclusion, understanding, and support for all – November 20.



Military Officers Association of America - Green Valley Chapter Collected 20 bags and boxes of food and other items for Veterans participating in the Homeless Program and HUD VASH – November 21.



Great American Smokeout Was held on main campus in building 80 lobby. Staff shared information with Veterans and family members on quitting smoking and Lung Cancer Awareness – November 21.



Volunteer Thanksgiving Luncheon Recognized the fantastic service Volunteers provided our Veteran patients. There are 308 regular volunteers and 183 special events/occasion volunteers who donated 41,175 hours in 2024. Our Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) hosted the luncheon - November 21.

SAVAHCS In the News

Onvida Health and Veterans Affairs Office Announce New Collaboration

The new partnership will allow recently graduated physicians in the Onvida Health (formerly Yuma Regional Medical Center) hospital's Family and Community Medicine Residency Program to attend clinical rotations at the Yuma Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC).

Jennifer Gutowski, the CEO of Southern AZ VA Healthcare, says "We're really excited to cultivate a new generation of providers and expose them to the great care that we provide at the VA And how we do primary care aligned teams and putting the Veteran at the center of it all." [Read more.](#)

VA Rehab Center Offers Hope, Training for Veterans with Visual Impairments

William Leos, Jr., is a US Navy veteran who started coming to the Southwestern Blind Rehabilitation Center at the VA in 2017.

Leos has a progressive eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa, which results in decreased vision at night and the loss of side vision. He was first diagnosed in 1989.

"My field of vision is real narrow at this stage in my life," he said, adding, "It's hard to accept it, but I have to learn to see in a different way." [Read more.](#)

SAVAHCS Construction Updates

Mental Health Building 90 expansion project to expand existing Mental Health Facility: Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) Mental Health Clinic construction phase scheduled to be completed by mid-December for the start of equipment installation. Furniture installs projected for mid to late-January 2025.

Mental Health Building 90 renovation project to convert the Agave clinic into a Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT)-compliant layout Renovation portion of the project will start with the Agave Clinic followed by the Mental Health Primary Care Staff space. Agave Clinic staff will move to the PRRC Mental Health Clinic early-February 2025.

Auditorium Stage Renovations A new door is currently being built. Flooring and door will be installed in the fall. Projected end date of March 2025.

Roof Repair Projects Building 50, 78 and 90 have been completed. Building 60 E3 roof tile started on October 28.

Emergency Department (ED) Renovations and Expansion The beginning stages of the construction project have started. The main walk-in entrance to the ED will be relocated during construction in the same vicinity as the previous entrance. Please follow the signs posted.

WWII Veterans' new eligibility for VA Health Care

If you served in World War II and are not currently enrolled in VA health care, this recent legislation ensures that you are now eligible for VA health care. WWII is defined as the period beginning December 7, 1941, and ending December 31, 1946. The Cleland-Dole Act was signed into law December 29, 2022. Section 101 of this law expands eligibility for VA care for Veterans of World War II. Apply today, even if you applied before and your application was not approved. Income level and service length do not matter.

WWII Veterans will be at minimum in Priority Group 6. You could be in a higher priority group if you have other eligibilities. Even if you were deferred before, please consider applying again. Please note, you must apply for VA health care if you are not currently enrolled. VA cannot automatically enroll you in VA care.

VA Priority Groups | Veterans Affairs

Cleland-Dole: Mental Health Copay Exemption

Veterans who owe [copays](#) for outpatient mental health and substance use disorder visits now have easier access to the soonest and best care. VA is canceling and refunding the first three mental health and substance use disorder copays in each calendar year between June 27, 2023, and December 29, 2027. [Learn more.](#)

PACT Act has expanded VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances, helping to provide generations of Veterans and their survivors with the care and benefits they have earned and deserve.

As of November 25, we have screened over 54,900 Veterans for Toxic Exposure Screenings.

COMPACT Act

Veterans in acute suicidal crisis can go to a VA or community health care facility to receive free emergency health care – including ambulance transportation costs – and be eligible for inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days and outpatient care for up to 90 days, including social work. This change was made possible by the Veterans COMPACT Act of 2020. For more information contact the COMPACT Act Coordinator Office at (520) 203-2191.

SERVICE Act

Signed into law in August 2022, the SERVICE Act focuses on the health effects of toxic exposures. While the PACT Act expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic-exposures and certain Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 eras, the SERVICE ACT focuses on ensuring that VA policy permits Veterans deployed to certain locations during certain periods of time to be eligible for a breast cancer risk assessment and mammography screening for breast cancer if a risk is found. For Veterans already using VA health care, see your primary care provider to assess your risk for breast cancer. If you're not already enrolled or using VA health care, go to <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply> for more information.

Veterans Crisis Line New Number

Dial 988, then Press 1- Veterans in crisis or those concerned about a Veteran can call to reach trained responders 24 hours a day, seven days a week to receive confidential crisis support.

Veterans can still call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at Chat (www.veteranscrisisline.net) and text 838255 to reach trained crisis responders.

Veterans can use the latest technology to connect with their health care teams

Veterans who have questions on how to use virtual technology options may reach out to the Virtual Health Resource Center (VHRC) at (520) 629-1713, email TucsonVHRC@va.gov or visit the center at the main facility in Bldg. 80 on the second floor. Hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Telephone or Video Appointments - Veterans may receive care at home, either over the phone or via video using VA Video Connect on their computers, smartphones, or tablets. Visit mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect or contact the VHRC to learn more.

Veterans can save time by using MyHealtheVet, the VA patient portal, for all their routine healthcare needs. Veterans can make medical appointments, contact providers, and request prescription refills. To learn more, contact the VHRC team at (520) 792-1450, extension 1-6889.

Prescription Refills - Veterans may request prescription refills, order, and have medications mailed to their homes using My HealtheVet or the VA Health and Benefits mobile app, which can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store or by visiting mobile.va.gov. Veterans may also order prescriptions via phone at (800) 470-8262 (press 1).

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network (VISN 22) Nurse Advice Line at (877) 252-4866 Veterans can call 24/7 to speak with a registered nurse for any routine health care questions over the phone.

Did You Know?

Primary Care, Mental Health, and Specialty Care appointment wait times by VHA facility can be found at the newly updated Access to Care website at <https://www.accesstocare.va.gov>.

Stand up to your fear of falling

A Matter of Balance is an evidence-based program that emphasizes practical strategies to reduce fear of falling and increase activity levels. Participants view falls and fear of falling as controllable, set realistic goals to increase activity, change their environment to reduce fall risk factors, and exercise to increase strength and balance. A simple exercise routine that is designed to be helpful in fall prevention is introduced in session three. The group meets for eight, two-hour sessions over four weeks. To learn more contact Rogan Adams at (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-4051 for more information.

SAVAHCS Local Contacts:

- Southern Arizona VA Health Care System Main Line (520) 792-1450 or 1-800-470-8262
- Caregiver Support Program (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-5390
- Care in the Community (520) 792-1450, extension, 1- 6555
- Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) (formerly Voluntary Services) (520) 629-1822
- Compensation and Pension (520) 629-4662
- Eligibility and Enrollment Section (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-6572 or 1-1740
- Homeless Program Coordinator (520) 792-1540, extension, 1-1839
- Medication Automated Refill Line (Toll Free) 1-800-470-8262, Press 1, then press 1 again to use the automated line to refill/renew a prescription
- Mental Health Clinic (520) 629-4884
- Virtual Health Resource Center (520) 629-1713 (for assistance with My HealthVet and other virtual care technologies)
- Native American Program (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-6622
- Patient Advocate Office (520) 629-4933
- Public Affairs (520) 629-1819
- Release of Information Office (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-4665
- Suicide Prevention Coordinator (520) 792-1450, extension, 1-6415

- Post-9/11 M2VA Case Management for Veterans recently separated from military (520) 269-1684
- Women's Health Clinic (520) 629-4885

VA National Contacts



- 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411) for all VA related questions about care, benefits, and services
- General VA Billing Questions 1-866-400-1238
- National Caregiver support line 1-855-260-3274
- National Memorial Cemetery Phoenix 480-513-1412
- Phoenix Regional Office (VBA) 1-800-827-1000VA Billing and collections Consolidated Patient Account Center (CPAC) 866-802-6819
- VA Health Care 877-222-8387 (VETS)
- VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Nurse Advice Line 1-877-252-4866