

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Overview of the State of Mental Health Care Services in the VHA Health Care System

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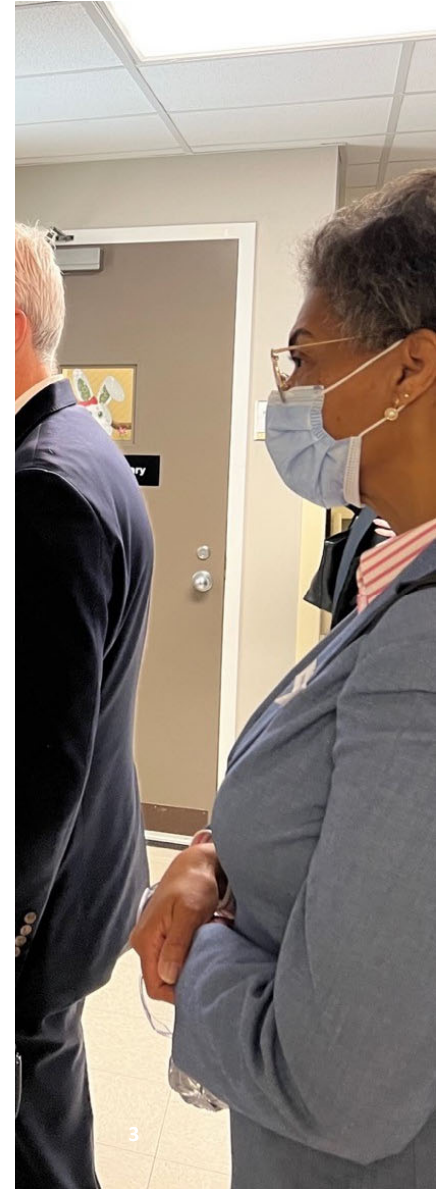
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Veteran Satisfaction

- A survey of Veterans who engaged in mental health care reported a high level of satisfaction with VA mental health care
 - 84% said VA mental health services overall are **helpful or very helpful**, compared to 71% for non-VA mental health services
 - 4 out of 5 Veterans said VA virtual care via telephone and/or video is **as helpful or more helpful** than in-person services
 - Around 90% said VA mental health providers **listened carefully, showed respect, and explained things** in a way that was easy to understand

Mental Health System of Care

- 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs)
- Over 170 medical centers
- Over 1,100 outpatient clinics
- 17,000 licensed mental health providers
- Veterans seen by mental health has doubled since 2006
- No wrong door – make an appointment online, through app, by phone or walk-in



Analytics, Evaluation and Research

- 3 Program Evaluation Centers evaluate the effectiveness of VA mental health programs using evidence-based, standardized performance metrics and build predictive models and clinical decision support tools
- 11 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers, each with an area of expertise (ex. suicide, serious mental illness, genetics, neuroscience, etc.)
- 2 Centers for Substance Abuse Treatment and Education, improving care for Veterans with substance use disorders
- Center for Integrated Healthcare, supporting integration of mental health into patient aligned care teams
- National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (NCPTSD), the world's leading research and educational center of excellence on PTSD and traumatic stress

Expanded Access

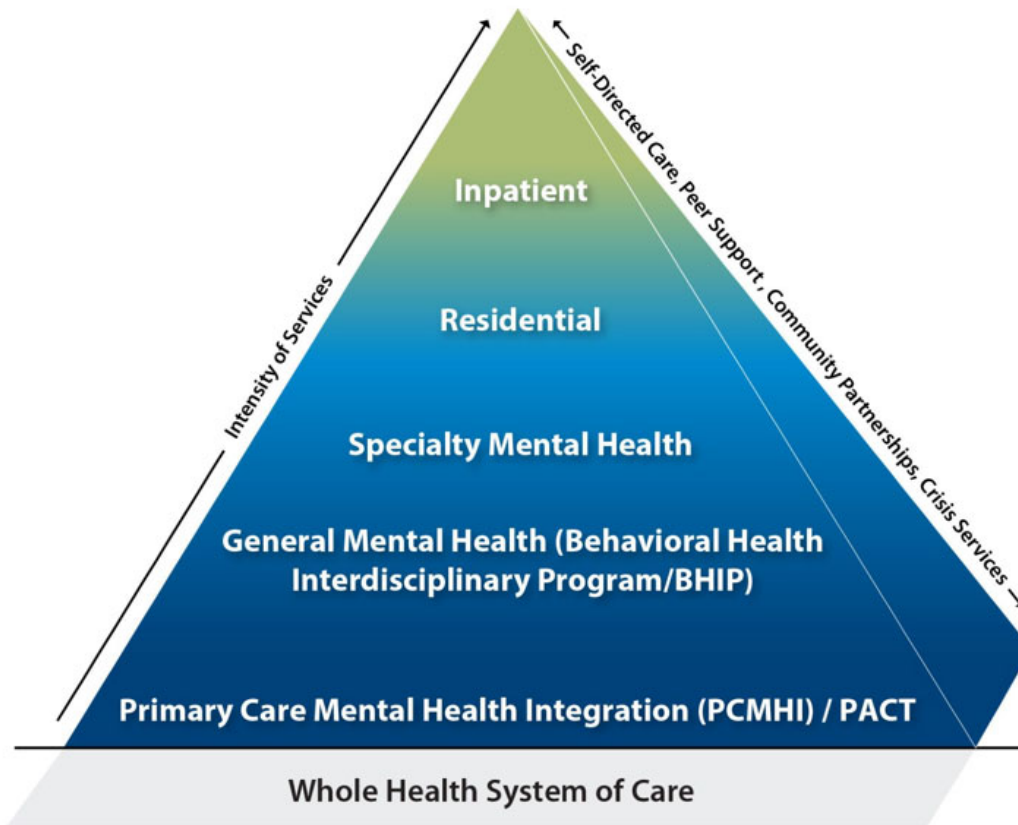
Since the NASEM completed their evaluation report of VHA Mental Health Services in 2018, VA has expanded eligibility and access to care:

- For those with Other Than Honorable discharge (38 USC 1720I)
- For enrolled and non-enrolled eligible Veterans needing acute suicide care
- To mental health care for caregivers
- To peer support for Veterans in crisis or at risk for suicide
- To VHA mental health care through community grant programs

VA Solid Start for Transitioning Service Members

- The Veterans Benefits Administration launched VA Solid Start (VASS) on December 2, 2019.
- To support Veterans and their families as they transition from the military, a trained VA representative reaches out to every newly separated Veteran three times during the first year of separation.
- From launch through March 31, 2023, VASS successfully connected with 337,478 recently separated Service members (68.9% successful connection rate).
- From launch through March 31, 2023, VASS successfully connected with 56,300 Priority Veterans (79.4% successful connection rate).

Mental Health Continuum of Care



- Stepped-care model to promote mental health treatment at the least intensive level of care appropriate
- Full range of inpatient, residential and outpatient specialty and general mental health services available in VA and through community partners
- Transition between levels according to Veteran's needs

Telemental Health (TMH) Services

- In FY22, nearly 1 million Veterans received almost 5.9M video TMH visits—a 13.7% increase in Veterans and 4% increase in visits over FY21
 - Of these, >910K Veterans received nearly 5.7M VVC-to-home visits
- In FY22, approximately 40% of total MH care has been in-person, while 34% of total MH care has been via video
 - VA MH providers and Veterans continue to gain experience and comfort using VA Video Connect, VA's secure video platform
 - Now, telehealth is not just a secondary strategy but is **becoming a universal, primary consideration for Veterans seeking MH care**
- VA is integrating TMH into the routine clinical practice of all mental health providers and ensuring Veterans are offered video as we know Veterans like video for their MH care.
 - After completing a TMH video-to-home visit, nearly half of Veterans prefer video to other modalities, including in-person.

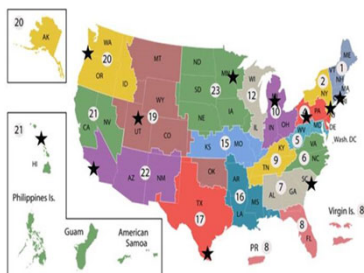
VA Telemental Health Service Models



*Clinic
Based*



*Into the
Home and
non-VA sites*



*VISN
Clinical
Resource
Hubs*



*National
Expert
Consultation*

Telemental Health: Equity and Access

- **Virtual Care Consortium of Research** supports research aimed at eliminating healthcare disparities
 - 2022 study found Veterans with VA-loaned tablets engaged in mental health appointments and psychotherapy at higher rates and had fewer emergency visits and less suicidal behavior.
- **Multiple educational offerings**, including monthly Tech Into Care Continuing Education series, for staff interested in use of technology (mobile apps, online interventions, telehealth) to support MH care
- Resources to support Veterans and providers in **implementing technology**
 - Digital Divide Consult and Connected Device Support Program (for loaned devices and connectivity)
 - VVC Education and test calls (to support successful visits)
 - Virtual Health Resource Centers (facility-based to help providers and Veterans with technology)
 - Office of Connected Care Help Desk (technical help desk for Veterans and providers)
- Work groups focused on increasing equitable care and access (e.g., with older Veterans)
- Support for increasing workplace flexibilities, including **telework**, to increase provider retention & access

Whole Health

- Expanding from disease management to a Whole Health system of care focused on what matters most to the Veteran
- Integrating whole health across mental health and primary care
- Includes peer support, coaching, well-being programs, and complementary and integrative health approaches
- Holistic, personalized, proactive and patient-driven
- Veteran outcomes: reduced opioid use, increased engagement in care, purpose and perceived stress
- Employee outcomes: reduced voluntary turnover, reduced burnout, increased motivation

We Serve All Who Served

- It is our privilege and duty to provide culturally responsive mental health care to our nation's Veterans
- New mission statement recognizes our commitment to all Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors:
 - “To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise to care for those who have served in our nation’s military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors.”
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee
 - Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Consultation Program provides support to VA providers
 - Data Disparities Committee reviews data on VA mental health services and outcomes
 - National Quarterly Clinical Calls and Community of Practice Calls provide a place of learning for providers
 - Workforce Diversity Committee focuses on improving inclusion, diversity and equity in our workforce
- Virtual care makes care accessible to Veterans wherever they live or work
- Outreach campaigns consider many perspectives to connect to diverse audiences

Peer Support

- While peer specialists cannot provide clinical counseling, they participate as members of the interdisciplinary health care teams and provide individual and group-based peer support services to VHA enrollees who use the health care services.
- Peer specialists work in a variety of health care settings, including outpatient, residential and inpatient mental health programs, intensive community mental health recovery services, psychosocial rehabilitation recovery centers, vocational rehabilitation services, homeless programs, Veterans Justice Program, primary care Patient-Aligned Care Teams (PACT), and the Veterans Crisis Line's Peer Support Outreach Center.
- Expanding and piloting promising peer specialist strategies and protocols tailored to enhance peer support for women Veterans

Pain Management and Opioid Safety in VHA Veterans

- Pain, medical and/or mental health comorbidities often related to military service and require Veteran-specific expertise
- Close correlation between pain intensity, suicide risk and death rates
- Integrated care model coordinates medical, psychological and social aspects of health care

Opioid Safety Initiative

- Comprehensive strategy to address opioid crisis
- All Veterans have access to medications for the treatment of opioid use disorder (OUD)
 - Nearly half of Veterans with OUD currently receive medication
 - Medications available to Veterans at their preferred points of care
 - OUD treatment consultation widely available to providers
 - Medication takeback program – 280 tons returned
 - Complementary and integrative medicine integration (ex. acupuncture)

Opioid Safety Initiative

- Opioid Education and Naloxone Distribution program
 - Distribute naloxone and educate on how to respond to an overdose
 - Over 2,670 overdose reversals with naloxone
- Stratification Tool for Opioid Risk Mitigation (STORM)
 - Flags risk factors for opioid overdose, suicide and other harms and provides risk mitigation strategies
 - 22% reduction in all-cause mortality among targeted Veterans
 - Model for interdisciplinary case review forums for patients with complex pain condition

Substance Use Disorder

- Leader in prevention and treatment of substance use disorders (SUDs)
- Dedicated Centers of Excellence
- More than 70 residential SUD treatment programs with over 1,800 beds
- Interprofessional team-based model of care
 - Clinical Pharmacist Practitioners deliver comprehensive medication management services and improve Veteran access to SUD care
- Contingency Management for stimulant use disorder

Suicide Prevention

- Eliminating Veteran suicide is a top VA priority
- Suicide rate among Veterans is 52% higher than non-Veteran adults
- Suicide rate in Veterans decreased in 2019 and 2020 ([last available data](#))
- Full public health model considers the many factors beyond mental health that contribute to risk for suicide and includes community-based and clinically based interventions
- Partner with federal, tribal, state, and local governments

Public Health Strategy

VA's public health strategy combines partnerships with communities to implement tailored, local prevention plans while also focusing on evidence-based clinical strategies for intervention. Our approach focuses on both what we can do now, in the short term, and over the long term, to implement VA's [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#).



KEY TENETS

1

Suicide is preventable.

2

Suicide prevention requires a public health approach, combining clinical and community-based approaches.

3

Everyone has a role to play in suicide prevention.

Suicide Prevention: SP NOW

- A set of goals that can be implemented in a short period of time
- The five priority areas of the SP Now plan are:
 - (1) Lethal Means Safety focused on firearm safe storage
 - (2) Suicide prevention in at-risk medical populations
 - (3) Outreach to and understanding of prior VHA users
 - (4) Suicide prevention program enhancements
 - (5) Media campaigns

Suicide Prevention: SP 2.0

To reach Veterans both inside and outside VA care, Suicide Prevention (SP) provides both community- and clinical-based national public health-oriented strategies

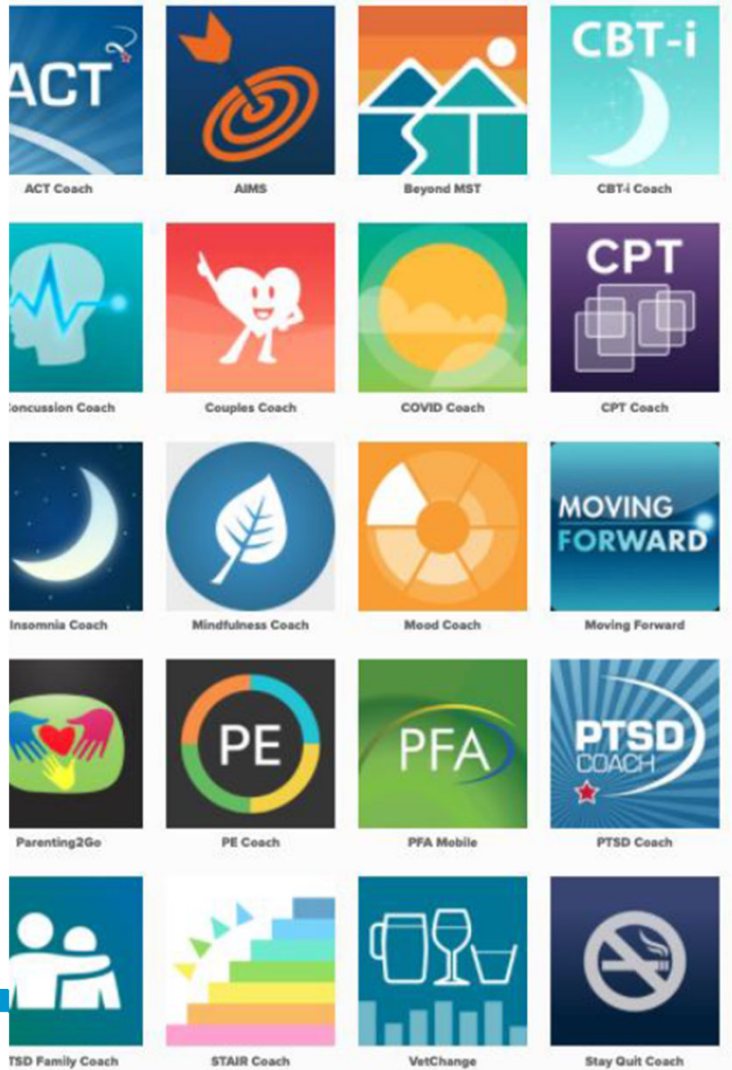
- **Community Strategies:** 49 states and 5 territories are participating in the VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge and more than 900 community coalitions have been formed across the country, working together towards ending Veteran suicide
- **Clinically-Based Interventions:** In partnership with the VHA Clinical Resource Hubs, the SP Clinical Telehealth Program offers evidence-based SP-focused psychotherapy in a fully virtual model to Veterans with a recent history of suicidal self-directed violence behaviors.

Peer Support Outreach Center

- To provide support, hope and recovery-oriented services to Veterans who are identified as at increased risk for suicide using outreach by certified peer specialists
 - Launched 5/24/21
 - 78% of Veterans reached accept follow-up
 - Preliminary data showed PSOC engagement decreased calls to the Veterans Crisis Line by Customers with Complex Needs
- Beginning to also outreach to individuals whose contact with VCL ended in Emergency dispatch

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- National Center for PTSD is global leader in PTSD expertise
- VA facilities have either a PTSD Clinical team or a PTSD Specialist to ensure Veterans have access to evidenced-based treatments for PTSD (ex. Prolonged Exposure, Cognitive Processing Therapy), medication, and comprehensive and integrated services such as acupuncture and yoga
- Comprehensive program of screening, diagnosing and treating patients with PTSD throughout the mental health continuum of care
 - 131 PTSD outpatient programs (including 3 specifically for Women Veterans)
 - 44 PTSD residential programs (including 5 specifically for Women Veterans)



National Center for PTSD

- Has developed 20 mobile apps with >5.6 million downloads
- Apps focus on PTSD, related concerns (e.g., insomnia, alcohol use), and well-being
(<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/index.asp>)
- Beyond MST, our newest app, designed to support survivors of military sexual trauma (>40,000 downloads)
- Added a new virtual patient to an artificial intelligence-guided training to help clinicians learn how to diagnose PTSD using the gold standard interview, the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale

Veteran Cultural Competence Training



- A day-long immersive experience in which attendees gain a new perspective on what it is like to be a veteran and the emotions they may experience in day-to-day life
- For anyone who provides services to, employs or regularly interacts with Veterans
- In-person and virtual options around the country
- <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn2/education/vcc.asp>

Public Outreach

- Over 130 interviews with over 315M public impressions in FY22
- Campaigns and outreach:
 - [About Face](#), stories about life after a traumatic event
 - [Make the Connection](#), thousands of different stories so Veterans see others like them talking about their mental health experiences, challenges and recoveries
 - [Veterans Crisis Line](#) and suicide prevention media campaign, including billboards, train station signs, commercials, etc. – wherever we can find Veterans
 - [KeepItSecure.Net](#), Lethal Means Safety campaign focused on firearm safety
- Mental Health Summits to engage partners in local communities
- National partnerships, such as National Alliance on Mental Illness
- Clinical consultation programs (ex. suicide risk management, PTSD)

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#BeThere

Thank you!