



# OFFICE OF NURSING SERVICES

2022 Annual Report



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration







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*Executive Director and  
Deputy Chief Nursing Officer,  
Office of Nursing Services for the  
Veterans Health Administration*

## A Message from Executive Director and Deputy Chief Nursing Officer Dr. Jennifer Strawn

Welcome to the 2022 Office of Nursing Services (ONS) Annual Report. Whether you are a Veteran, nurse, administrator, or community member, we are thrilled to share our progress with you. This year's report specifically honors our VA nurses, and I have a special message for them. This year's report will celebrate you, the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) nurse, and all that you are achieving nationwide. This is your annual report. It's a time to reflect on the past year and remember our successes.

VA nursing is unique. We represent the largest profession within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), we work for the largest health care system in the U.S., and we work for the largest employer of nurses in the country. We also serve different geographic regions of the country, which experience unique challenges that require innovative solutions, including staffing and other flexibilities. This is where there are opportunities for nursing creativity and boldness in developing solutions to our most pressing challenges.

This annual report highlights the accomplishments VA nurses achieve every day. Each one of you continues to inspire me and allows me to have a positive outlook for not only stabilizing, but also dramatically improving the VA nursing workforce. As we continue to work together and support one another, our future is bright as we serve our nation's

Veterans. Since the early days of our profession, nurses have met challenges with a sense of purpose and determination to deliver solutions and to provide exceptional, quality care.

Despite the challenges of the ongoing staffing crisis, the prolonged pandemic and accompanying staff burnout, continuing supply chain issues, and the new electronic health record (EHR) deployment, **VA nurses across the nation are meeting the moment for Veterans, their families, and caregivers.** As VA Nurses, we are all connected in our solemn commitment to meet the four statutory missions of VA, including caring for Veterans wherever they are. This is a heavy responsibility that places a great deal of stress on many among our ranks. I encourage you to engage in self-care, including seeking out VA's mindfulness and resiliency practices available to all. You'll read about some of these initiatives in the pages that follow.

The 2022-2032 VHA Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan was designed to strengthen our nursing workforce and focuses on four pillars that frame this annual report: optimizing and informing nursing practice, strengthening the nursing workforce, reimagining lifelong learning and career development, and inspiring an industry-leading culture. These pillars are threaded throughout this document as we highlight the impacts, achievements, and learning moments of VA nurses in 2022. Thank you for all that you do for Veterans and VA Nursing!

## Contents

- About Office of Nursing Services (ONS)** ..... 4
- The Four Pillars of the VHA Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan**..... 6
  - Pillar One: Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice..... 9
  - Pillar Two: Strengthening the Nursing Workforce..... 13
  - Pillar Three: Reimagining Lifelong Learning and Career Development..... 17
  - Pillar Four: Inspiring an Industry-Leading Culture ..... 21
- VHA Nurses by the Numbers 2022**..... 24
- Faces from the Frontlines** ..... 26
- Celebrating Success** ..... 28
- The Continued Fight Against COVID-19**..... 30
- A Nursing Legend Retires: Dr. Beth Taylor, DHA, RN, NEA-C, FAAN** ..... 31



# About Office of Nursing Services (ONS)

**ONS Mission: To honor the Veteran through excellence in healthcare delivery**

How does ONS complete this high-priority mission? With a nursing workforce that, day in and day out, goes the extra mile to transform the lives of Veterans and their families by playing a pivotal role in their long-term, holistic health.

The pages that follow in this annual report will illustrate how VHA nurses remain steadfastly committed to the success of their patients, continuing to innovate, excel, and transform the lives of those they care for, even when facing challenge after challenge. ONS accomplishes this world-class, Veteran-centered standard of care through VHA nurses and the portfolios which support their work through advocates, leaders, and subject matter experts across varied nursing specialties.



Learn more about ONS at [va.gov/nursing](https://va.gov/nursing).



**Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CC&ICM)** framework aims to reduce duplication and improve coordination and communication. Through stronger systems and clinical integration, a Lead Coordinator is assigned to vulnerable Veterans for care integration across the continuum.



**Clinical Practice (CP)** promotes quality care for Veterans through evidence-based practice recommendations and innovations, improving patient care outcomes and access to care. CP is comprised of the Clinical Practice Program (CPP), the National Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) Practice Program, the National Nursing Leadership Committee (NNLC), and other nursing practice initiatives.



**Electronic Healthcare Record Modernization (EHRM)** is part of the VA's multiyear effort to modernize its nearly 40-year-old electronic health record system. Modernization will improve health care delivery, support the care nursing provides, and simplify the patient experience across the service member to Veteran care continuum.



**Policy and Strategic Planning** provides guidance and action plans for all issues related to nursing practice, education, research, and workforce for clinical programs across the care delivery sites that impact our Veterans.



**Policy, Legislation, and Professional Standards (PLPS)** eliminates barriers to nursing practice and staffing through the modernization of the Nurse Qualification Standards and improves Veteran care delivery systems and nurse career advancement through the development and implementation of national policy and legislative proposals.



**Research, Evidence-Based Practice, and Analytics (REA)** supports the discovery of new nursing knowledge through science. REA implements this knowledge by using Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) and innovation, creating organizational learning through documentation of performance outcomes through nursing analytics.



**Travel Nurse Corps (TNC)** represents an internal pool of registered nurses (RN) and advanced practice registered nurses (APRN) available for temporary assignments throughout VHA. Travel nurses support nursing in rural and underserved areas, and during national emergencies while maintaining ONS' high standards of patient care, quality, and safety.



**Workforce and Leadership (WFL)** focuses on implementing best practices to support a highly-qualified nursing workforce through innovative recruitment and retention strategies, the development of resource tools that forecast nurse staffing, succession planning, and leadership development. These efforts create a well-prepared VA nursing workforce that provides high-quality, patient-driven care.

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**

**1,298** health care facilities, including **171** medical centers and **1,113** outpatient sites of care, serving **9 million** enrolled Veterans each year.



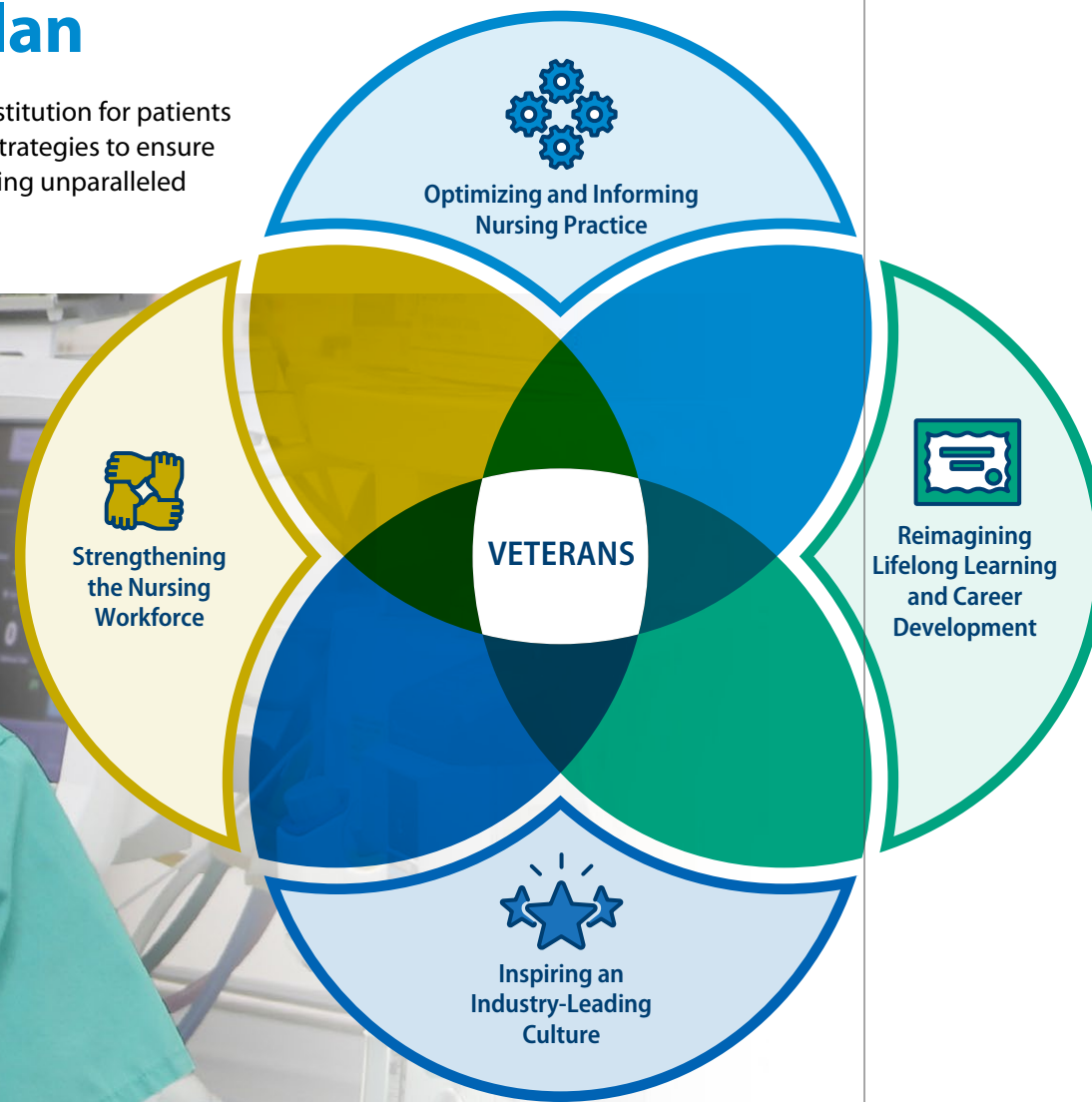
VA is the largest employer of nursing personnel in the U.S, with more than **113,000** nurses. ONS represents:

- ▶ Nurse Practitioners (NPs)
- ▶ Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs)
- ▶ Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs)
- ▶ Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs)
- ▶ Registered Nurses (RNs)
- ▶ Licensed Practical Nurses/ Licensed Vocational Nurses (LPNs/LVNs)
- ▶ Nursing Assistants (NAs)



# The Four Pillars of the VHA Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan

VHA's 10-Year Vision Statement is to be the preeminent institution for patients and employees alike. The four aspirational pillars are key strategies to ensure an innovative, best-in-class nursing workforce while building unparalleled trust in Veterans and their families and caregivers.



I may be compelled to face danger, but never fear it, and while our soldiers can stand and fight, I can stand and feed and nurse them.

—CLARA BARTON, FOUNDER OF THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

Jim Roupe, CRNA, Martinsburg VA Medical Center, Martinsburg, WV

## Pillar One: Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice

- » VHA leads the nation in developing national standards of practice across all geographies and care settings.
- » Nurses hold leadership positions that define and drive the strategy in peer-to-peer collaboration with physicians 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 an unparalleled breadth and depth of opportunities in education, research, teaching, and leadership experiences.
- » Nurses have comprehensive, personalized developmental journeys, customized to meet goals and to 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, 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 together outpace private sector offers.







## **Pillar One:** Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice

The VHA nursing workforce is expert at making any situation, opportunity, and resource work for the benefit of Veterans. Keep reading for a small snapshot of what VA nurses did in 2022 to maximize their practices for the good of Veterans and the healthcare industry.

NOEL MARCANTEL | noelmarcanel.com





**9 MILLION**  
**VETERANS**  
 and their family members will have increased access to care and improved health outcomes when the EHR is complete.

### New Weapon in the Battle Against Pneumonia

We know nurses are heroes. They now have a new tool to add to their superpowers: the humble toothbrush. Oral care routines can prevent non-ventilator hospital-acquired pneumonia (NVHAP). The Hospital Acquired Pneumonia Prevention by Engaging Nurses (HAPPEN) program utilizing consistent oral care was implemented in every Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in 2021. The work continued in 2022, leading to dramatically improved inpatient outcomes thanks to mentoring and coaching by ONS leads.



Army Veteran James Massie, a patient at the Salem Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Salem, Virginia, gets his teeth brushed by nursing assistant Teresa Quarles in June.

**29%** reduction in patients with NVHAP in facilities that report data

### A First in VHA History

ONS, Office of Nursing Informatics (ONI), and countless field-based nurses across VHA helped to standardize acute inpatient documents and templates across the entire VHA, a first-of-its-kind achievement. This standardization means VA Approved Acute Enterprise Standard (VAAES) health factors documents—including admission screenings, assessments, and standard operating procedures—are now streamlined. This update ensures the tools used to document Veteran care remain accurate and consistent across all channels.

In 2022:  
**2,400** unique VAAES Health Factors were captured **433 million** times and:

- » **455,830** admission assessments
- » **5.53 million** shift assessments
- » **4.01 million** frequent assessments
- » **685,000** IV assessments and inserts
- » **822,070** oral care assessments
- » **5.13 million** skin assessments were completed on **811,527 unique Veterans!**

### Transforming Healthcare Documentation

Transitioning from active duty to Veteran status can create gaps in a patient's medical history. The new Electronic Healthcare Record (EHR) system, when completed, will create an uninterrupted healthcare experience for service members transitioning to Veteran status. Nurses are the most significant users of the EHR. In 2022, ONS continued to ensure that field nurses' input will help provide functionality to support all nurses. Many of the changes suggested have been adopted as model content. Full implementation of the EHR system across all VA facilities is scheduled for completion by 2028.

### Excellence in Evidence-Based Practice

In 2021, ONS and frontline nurses partnered with the renowned Helene Fuld Health Trust National Institute (Fuld Institute) for Evidence-Based Practice (EBP), a national hub for the formation, teaching and dissemination of best practices to improve healthcare quality, safety, patient outcomes, and cost. The 2022 VHA cohort in the Fuld Institute Immersions was made up of 350 participants. The VHA participants implemented what they learned at their health care facilities.



Through the utilization of frontline nurse expertise, along with support from other VHA program offices, ONS's Clinical Practice Program (CPP) helped to standardize nursing practice across numerous fields of endeavor while promoting quality care for high-risk Veteran populations. A few of the many highlights from 2022 include:

» **Keeping Hearts Healthy**  
 ONS and the National Cardiology Program Office developed a new directive for providers in managing electrocardiograms (ECGs) across VHA. This initiative will help standardize processes for the management of ECGs while ensuring proper procurement of ECG tracings, transmission to the ECG image management system, routing for clinical interpretation, and long-term image storage and retrieval.

» **Supporting a Top Priority**  
 VA's top clinical priority is preventing Veteran suicide. To support suicide prevention, several training protocols were developed, including 15-minute check-ins for patients experiencing suicidal thoughts. In addition, ONS collaborated with the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) and the National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS) to establish training on the care for medical patients experiencing suicidal ideations.

### One-Stop Shopping for Veterans

Managing different providers, specialists, medications, and therapists can be overwhelming for Veterans. VHA has found a solution to better assist Veterans in managing their care coordination needs. In 2022, with the launch of the second phase of Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CC&ICM) deployment, more than 120 healthcare systems are actively engaged in implementing strategies and clinical integration of all VHA programs and services offered to Veterans. For Veterans with moderate or complex care coordination needs, a lead coordinator can facilitate medical, psychosocial and mental health needs across the continuum of care. By coordinating with other care managers and case managers, CC&ICM promotes continuity of care and positive outcomes.

*"The best way I can explain care management to patients is that I am their gatekeeper. As their nurse, I evaluate their needs, assessing both physical medicine and mental health. Care managers are the first point of contact to get them to where they need when they need it. We build a rapport and trust, so they know they've got that one lead coordinator they can always communicate with."*

—DEBORAH DAVIS, PACT NURSE, AUSTIN, TX

Learn more about CC & ICM here

In 2022:  
**67%** of participating facilities had at least one quality improvement outcome.

**94%** have instituted EBP councils to continue this work to improve Veteran care and outcomes.

**60** VHA staff have received their EBP certificate/certification.



### Leading The Way

ONS conducted two highly successful EBP Leadership Workshops to promote leadership support of EBP.

**97%** of participants increased in their knowledge in leading others in EBP.

**92%** strengthened their confidence in guiding others in EBP.

**95%** increased their competence in building and sustaining an evidence-based culture.

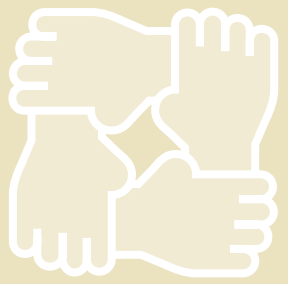




## **Pillar Two:** Strengthening the Nursing Workforce

With more than 113,000 nurses, VHA is the largest employer of nurses in the country. Our nurses are critical in every aspect of Veteran care. A nationwide nursing shortage puts patients at risk in understaffed facilities. ONS and VHA nurses are combating this for VHA by streamlining onboarding processes, providing more career mobility opportunities, and investing in high-caliber research and residency programs.

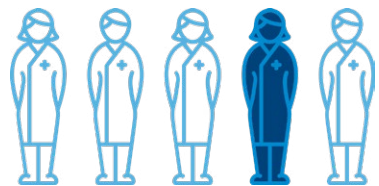




## Pillar Two



### Recruitment and Retention CHALLENGES



**ONE** of **FIVE** RNs nationwide are eligible to retire within five years.

American Hospital Association projects a shortage of 500,000 RNs by 2026.

Over the next five years, VHA will need to hire approximately **15,500** nurses per year for a total of **77,500**.

**7,240** RNs, NPs, and CRNAs left VHA in FY2022.

### Recruitment and Retention SUCCESSES

**91%** retention of VHA RNs

**9.0%** turnover rate for VHA registered nurses compared to **18.7%** in the private sector

**45 VA Medical Centers** held surge hiring events, leading to **2,100** possible new recruits.



### REBOOT: Battling Nursing Burnout

It's not news that a career as a nurse, while very rewarding, offers a disproportionate amount of emotional stress and physical fatigue. What is news—and good news, too—is an initiative to address burnout and promote professional fulfillment among all VHA employees. The Reduce Employee Burnout and Optimize Organizational Thriving (REBOOT) Task Force identifies the top contributors to burnout to help build a workplace where every nurse can thrive and find purpose, fulfillment, and joy in their work. The end goal will not only be to retain nurses, but also to support Veterans by ensuring our nursing staff can always give their best.

## TOP 10 VHA Blueprint Nursing Recruitment & Retention Strategies

1. Use Education Debt Reduction Program to target hard-to-recruit and retain nurse specialties.
2. Use staffing methodology, future forecasting, and leverage VA Trainee Recruitment Events.
3. Maximize the use of pay flexibilities.
4. Maximize the effective use of the 3Rs: Recruitment, Retention, and Relocation.
5. Hire and develop nurse recruiters through Nurse Recruiter Orientation and Nurse Recruiter University.
6. Leverage online tools and resources for nurse recruitment and retention.
7. Add mission-critical nurse specialists to the VAMC Employee Referral Awards Program.
8. Utilize creative recruitment and hiring campaigns.
9. Implement Stay Touchpoints through the Stay in VA initiative.
10. Use VHA Education and Scholarship Programs to develop highly qualified nursing professionals.

## 2022 Nursing Scholarships and Residency Programs

# 145

### Health Professional Scholarship Program (HPSP) Participants

HPSP offers scholarships through the Army, Navy, and Air Force for students who attend medical school programs.

# of HPSP students per degree

**16** Associate degrees in Nursing

**117** Bachelor of Science degrees in nursing

**12** Master of Science degrees in nursing or higher

# 295

### Veterans Affairs Learning Opportunities Residency (VALOR) Participants

VALOR is an honors program for select nursing students who have completed the junior year of a baccalaureate nursing program, providing structured clinical experience and educational coursework.

## \$5.11 million

is the 2022 annual budget administered by VALOR.

## \$3.0 million

additional funds provided by ONS.



From 2007 through September 30, 2022, VA has awarded

# 6,742 awards

 to VALOR participants.

### From Novice to Expert

Making the leap from nursing student to clinical practice can be daunting. Recent RN grads can switch from academia to a complex practice environment with the employee-based Registered Nurse Transition to Practice (RNTTP) Residency Programs. Under the guidance of an RN who has completed specialized training to aid new graduates, the RNTTP participants receive a 12-month curriculum built upon clinical, leadership, and professional development standards, along with Veteran-specific care content. This experience allows graduates to confidently keep growing and learning by taking on new challenges in patient care with expert help.



In 2022:

# 772

new nurses participated in RNTTP.

# 117

medical facilities hosted RNTTP programs.

# 115

medical facilities used the **Elsevier Mosby Preceptor Program**, the gold standard in enabling novice nurses to apply their critical thinking to clinical practice. **89** of these facilities used **Elsevier 3.0**.

# 48

staff members learned to attract top-quality candidates in the Nurse Recruiter RNTTP training program.



### Mindful Mondays

Practicing mindfulness is proven to help with stress management, positivity, and focus. When is a busy nurse able to carve out the time? The VHA initiative Mindful Mondays encourages nurses and other employees to set aside 15-minutes at the beginning of the week to focus on breathing, guided imagery, and relaxation.



Interested in working as a VA nurse? Find your career path at [www.vacareers.va.gov](http://www.vacareers.va.gov).





### **Pillar Three:** Reimagining Lifelong Learning and Career Development

Nurses make a commitment to lifelong learning to ensure their education remains relevant, deepen their knowledge, and become leaders in patient care. ONS strongly supports the belief that nurses in all settings should have access to opportunities in education, leadership experiences, and personalized developmental journeys to expand their career options.

BILL GEORGE, VAPHS MEDIA PHOTOGRAPHER

*Elena Lerma (center), Doctor of Nursing Practice Nurse Anesthetist student, learns Project Golden Eagle techniques to treat Veterans with emergence delirium in a simulated safety training course. Learn more about Project Golden Eagle on [page 27](#).*





Pillar Three



### The Pursuit of Excellence

The American Nursing Credentialing Center (ANCC) Magnet Recognition Program® is not merely an award for excellence in health care, it also recognizes a facility that focuses on nursing talent and supports nurses to be the very best they can be. In 2022, VA Portland Health Care System was recognized for earning its fourth ANCC Magnet designation and the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center was designated as an ANCC Pathway to Excellence.®



**60%** of VA HEALTH CARE FACILITIES have achieved or are pursuing an increased level of excellence status.

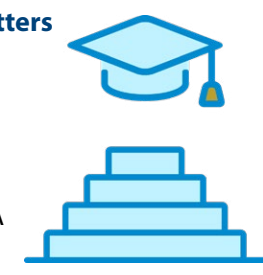
### Next Generation of Nurse Leaders

When VA medical facilities need nurse managers, the best recruits are already among their ranks. The American Organization for Nursing Leadership conducted four virtual Nurse Manager Institute sessions in 2022 to prepare new VA nurse managers to be successful in this challenging and rewarding leadership role. Participants took part in lectures, case studies, and self-assessments.

**347**  
NURSES  
completed the  
Nurse Manager program.

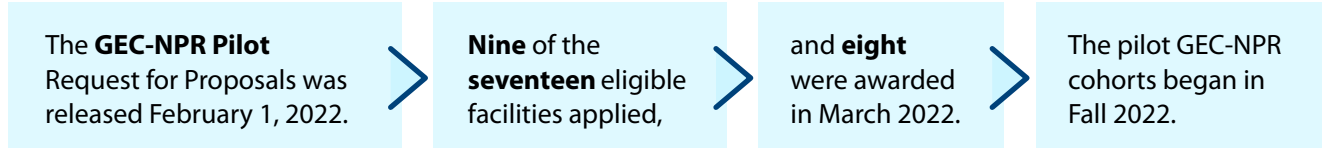
### Recognition Matters

For the first time, **doctoral level nursing trainees** were included in the 2022-2028 VA Strategic Plan.



### Caring for Aging Veterans

Providing care to older Veterans requires attention to both age-related and Veteran-specific needs. ONS, the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA), Geriatric and Extended Care (GEC), and frontline nurses all collaborated to establish a new Geriatric and Extended Care Nurse Practitioner Residency (GEC-NPR) Program. The program will enhance novice NPs' knowledge and skills when caring for the aging Veteran population. ONS also partnered with GEC to develop and implement strategies to provide Community Living Center (CLC) staff with the skills and training to deliver the highest quality of care to Veterans.



### Nurse Scientists

The Nursing Research Field Advisory Committee began the national Nursing Research Collaborative in August with more than 60 attendees. This collaboration's goal is to link scientists across VHA in a network that will support multisite studies, mentoring opportunities, professional development activities, and sharing results of nursing science in VHA.

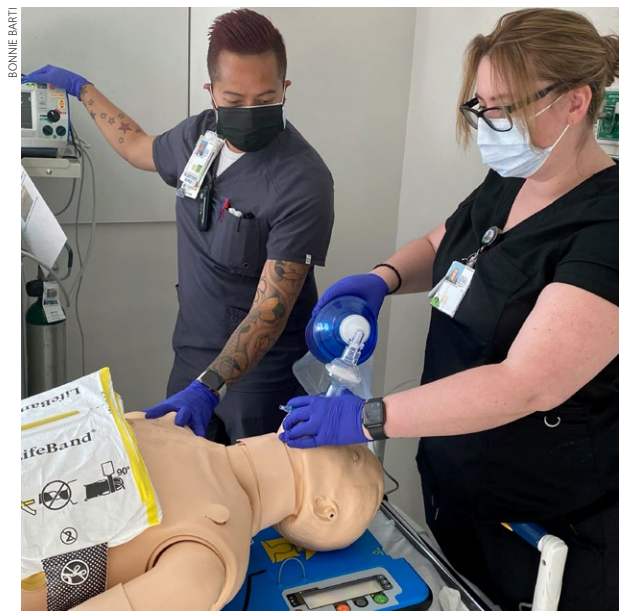
### Leaders in Their Fields

Clinical Nurse Advisors and their respective Field Advisory Committees (FAC) developed various evidence-based products and resources for use by nursing staff across the system, such as clinical practice guidelines, educational offerings, and documentation tools.



### The Bridge Between Classroom and Clinical Care

Simulation provides safe opportunities for nurses to practice their clinical skills to improve the quality of health care delivery to Veterans. National Facility Simulation Certification is awarded through the Simulation Learning, Evaluation, Assessment, and Research Network (SimLEARN), VHA's premiere program for simulation in health care training. SimLEARN provides resources to assist facilities in creating a safe learning environment and using cutting-edge technology. Mastering these skills enables VAMCs the opportunity to become nationally certified and recognized.



Lowen Patigayon, BSN, RN, and Hannah Bailey, BSN, RN, at SimLEARN Center, Southern Nevada Las Vegas Medical Center

Also in 2022, the updated Facility Simulation Certification website went live with a more streamlined application process. To ensure the highest standards, intermediate-level facilities require a virtual interview, while advanced-level facilities require an onsite visit that includes meeting with faculty and instructors, a tour of the simulation spaces, and observation of simulation classes.

Let us never consider ourselves finished nurses. We must be learning all of our lives.  
—FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

In 2022:

**53**  
facilities had  
SimLEARN  
certifications:

19  
Basic

15  
Intermediate

9  
Advanced





## **Pillar Four:** Inspiring an Industry- Leading Culture

VHA nurses make a difference by serving those who have served our country. They care for our Veterans tirelessly and selflessly. To support nurses in this heroic mission, VHA is determined to offer a thoughtful culture that values inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, as well as benefits, compensation, and a workplace environment that outpaces the private sector and a shared governance model that empowers all nurses.





Pillar Four



### More Help for Working Parents

As one of VA Secretary Denis McDonough's 10 major steps to invest in VA employees, VA increased the total family income threshold for its childcare subsidy program from \$89,999 to \$144,000 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. This move, effective on March 15, 2022, helps more VHA nurses access affordable childcare.

### A Nurse's Viewpoint

The National Nursing Practice Council (NNPC) continued to provide the staff nurse perspective in 2022. Their first-hand experiences regarding issues and activities that impact their practice are crucial in establishing best practice recommendations.



### Wellness at Work

Nurses work hard daily with fantastic care and compassion. Their humbleness makes it easy for patients, their families, and administrators to take for granted what they do. That's why during Nurses Month in May 2022, ONS made sure to get the message out to all of VA that nurses make a difference with special events tailored to the given theme for each week:

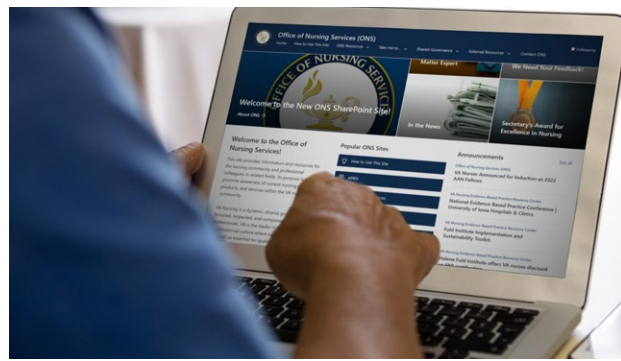
- » Week 1—Self Care
- » Week 2—Recognition
- » Week 3—Professional Development
- » Week 4—Community Engagement

These widely attended events provided support, access to wellness and professional development resources, and official recognition of the many contributions of VA frontline nurses and nurse executives.

*Elizabeth Atwood Childs, LPN, Clinic Nurse, celebrates National Nurses Month at Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks.*

### New ONS SharePoint Site Goes Live

In order to better serve more than 113,000 nursing staff, the internal ONS web site was consolidated and modernized this year. The improved organization, streamlined navigation, and updated search capability enables busy nurses to locate the resources they need with ease.



### Legislation at Work for Nurses

In 2022, ONS joined forces with Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC) to collaborate on four legislative proposals:

<b>VA Nurse and Physician Assistant Retention and Income Security Enhancement (R.A.I.S.E.) Act</b>	Lifts VA pay caps for APRNs and RNs, allowing the VA to offer more competitive salaries in specific areas of the country for nurses in highly competitive markets.	Passed March 2022
<b>Amendment to Expand Coverage for Nurse Executive Special Pay</b>	Creates a financial incentive for internal candidates to move to positions with a broader managerial scope, complexity, and responsibility.	Pending
<b>Reimbursement of Continuing Professional/Medical Education for Physician Assistants and APRNs</b>	Reimbursement for continuing education benefits to APRNs and PAs who have a state requirement for continuing education.	Pending
<b>Ensuring a Strong and Capable Nursing Workforce to Meet all VHA Missions</b>	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.	Pending



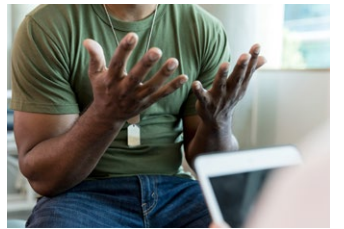
### The Voice of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN)

The National APRN Practice Program serves as the voice for APRNs across the VHA. In 2022, the program:

- » Conducted **2 National Town Halls**
- » Held **3 National APRN professional development series**
- » Created **6 new local VA healthcare system APRN councils**
- » Developed the **first APRN qualification standards in VHA**
- » Established **6 specialty interest groups** to provide opportunities for networking among colleagues, sharing best practices, and developing resources in the following areas:
  - › Critical Care
  - › Neurology
  - › Ear, Nose, and Throat
  - › Renal
  - › Gastroenterology
  - › Women's Health

### Minority Mental Health Awareness Month

Held in July, Minority Mental Health Awareness Month not only provides an opportunity for nursing staff to focus on promoting mental health equity and mental and emotional wellbeing for Veterans, but it also calls attention to the abundance of resources in support of the diverse nursing workforce.



Current VA nurses can find information about the programs, resources, and other opportunities mentioned in this report at the ONS Sharepoint: [dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vaons](https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vaons).



# VHA Nurses by the Numbers 2022

## Nursing Workforce on the Move

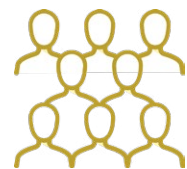
VA is the **#1 employer** of nursing personnel in the U.S., with more than **113,000 nurses**, including:

**74,846** RNs | **15,345** LPNs/LVNs | **14,248** NAs | **7,827** NPs | **1,136** CRNAs | **252** CNSs | **2** CNMs

**3** of the top **9 clinical shortage occupations** at the VHA are **RNs, LPNs/LVNs, and NAs**

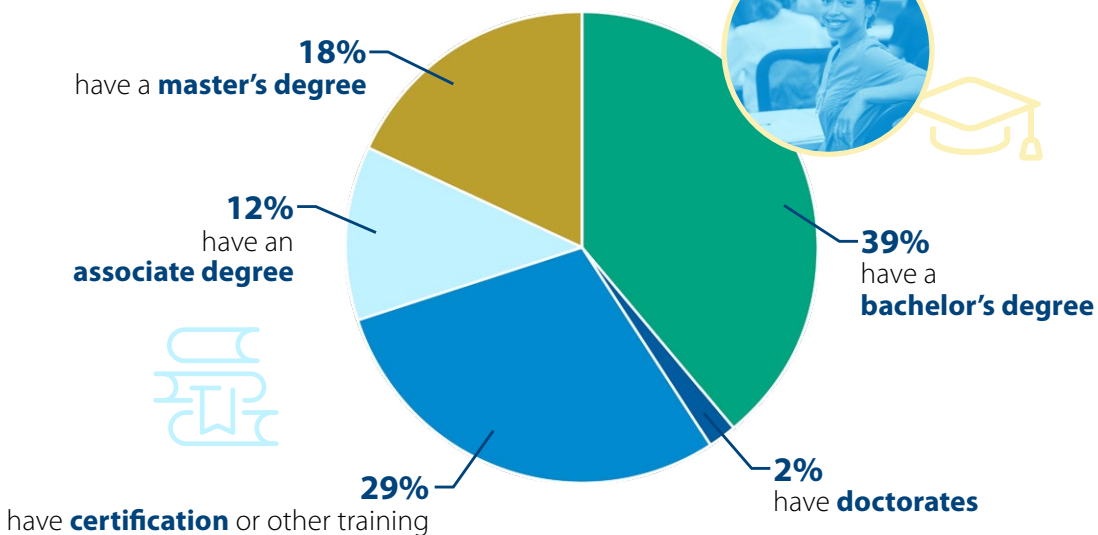
Over the next five years VHA will **need to hire** approximately

**15,500** nurses per year for a total of **77,500** (RNs, NAs, LPNs, VNs, NPs, CRNAs)



**5%** increase in external hires over 2021

## A Well-Educated Nursing Workforce



## Nurses at Work

**6,752,638** unique patients were treated in 2022, a two-year increase of **4.7%**

Outpatient visits increased by **8.2%** in the last two years, with **88,010,377** visits in 2022



## Travel Nurse Corps (TNC)

**101,839** total hours worked by TNC nurses

**69** TNC nurses were deployed daily

**\$322,000** in travel expenses saved with virtual visits

**1,908** Veteran Functional Assessment Instruments completed

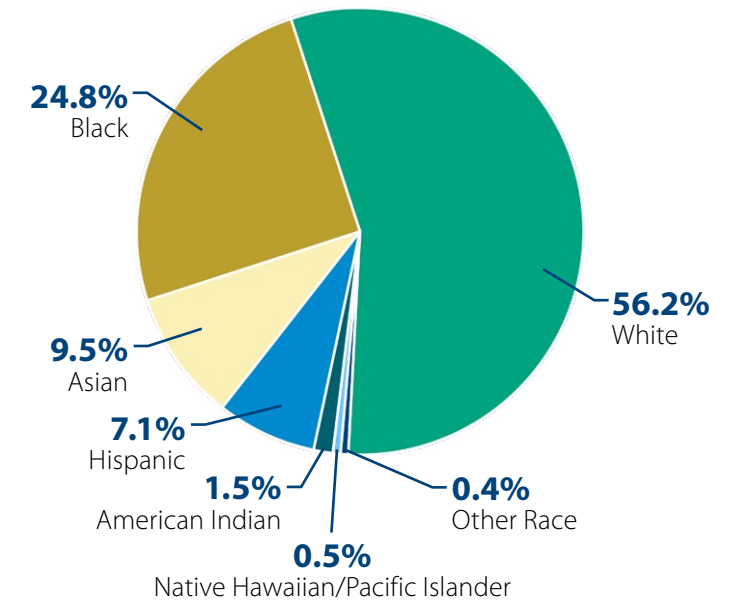
**4,551** Caregiver and Veteran Assessments performed

## Supporting Nurses in The Field

The Clinical Practice Program (CPP) comprises 13 Clinical Nurse Advisors who serve as subject matter experts in their area of practice and provide oversight to 13 individual Field Advisory Committees (FAC), consisting of over 143 front-line staff.

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

## VHA Nursing Workforce Diversity Demographics



**13.9%** of the VHA nursing workforce is made up of Veterans.



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

## Residents on the Rise

In 2021-22, the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) conducted:

**116** nurse residency programs

Of the **116**—  
**48** were at the RN level and **68** at the NP level

Out of the **68** NP residency programs, the following specialties were offered:

- 26** Mental Health
- 34** Primary Care
- 8** Geriatrics and Extended Care



**91%** PB-RNRs and **64%** NPRs were retained after their residencies despite no VA service obligation

**24** new resident positions were offered as part of the Geriatrics and Extended Care Nurse Residency pilot programs

**10** Advanced Fellowship programs with nursing trainees and **45** nursing trainee positions



# Faces from the Frontlines

VHA facilities across the country honor Veterans through excellence in health care delivery every day. Here are just a few of the many nurses who have gone above and beyond to provide the exceptional care that is the hallmark of VHA.

## 1. A Medical Mystery Solved

When Veteran Larry Washington showed up in the Detroit VAMC ED complaining of nausea,

His wife gave me the biggest hug and said, 'You saved our lives.'

—RICHARD HALL, EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT (ED) NURSE

headache, and disorientation, all the tests came back normal. Nurse Richard Hall treated his patient for dehydration and feeling much better, Mr. Washington went home.

When the symptoms returned, Mr. Washington went to two other ED departments before returning to the VAMC. Mr. Hall was determined to get to the root of the illness. After asking many questions, including how his wife was feeling (she was beginning to develop the same symptoms), Mr. Hall asked the question that cracked the case: Had there been any work done in their home recently? When the couple mentioned a new furnace installed in their apartment complex, Mr. Hall told them to call the energy company immediately. A carbon monoxide leak was the culprit. Mr. Hall saved their lives and the lives of other residents in the building.

"He was the only one who could tell me what was going on. Mr. Hall, he figured it out," said Mr. Washington.



WATCH the video

serious illnesses. At the Cleveland VAMC, a multi-disciplinary team of dedicated nurses, dietitians, and other VHA staff worked together to implement an inpatient food pantry program for Veterans with food insecurity.

While all Veterans receive screening for food security and nurses can make referrals to various agencies and pantries, the food bag program allows Veterans to immediately access nutritious foods.

"When we place a food bag in the hands of a Veteran, we see this overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude. They are blown away that we are able to provide food that very day." Jennifer Davis, clinical dietitian.



LEARN MORE about the food bag program

## 2. Healing with Healthy Food

Health and nutrition go hand in hand. When Veterans are not sure where their next meals are coming from, it makes it impossible to focus on cancer care, treatment for heart disease, nutrition for diabetes, or a host of other chronic and

Veterans might be in the hospital for three to five days, and when they go home, their cupboards could be bare.

—SHARON WATTS, NURSE PRACTITIONER

## 3. Caring for a Veteran's Best Friend

Dog wrangling is not in a VHA nurse's job description. But nothing would stop RNs Elizabeth Rogers and Maureen Wilson of Lake City VAMC from making sure the dog of a recently deceased Veteran got the care she needed.

It makes a difference to know that you have made a Veteran's day better or their family's day a little bit easier.

—MAUREEN WILSON, RN

When a young critical patient, described as friendly and sweet, passed away, his mother called, worried about the Veteran's beloved dog. Had she been alone in the apartment this whole time?

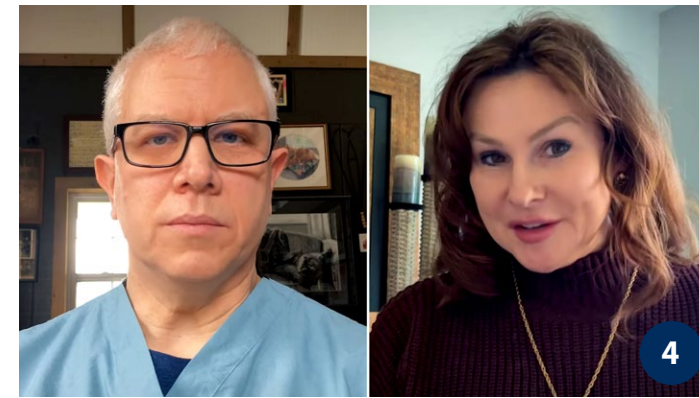
Ms. Rogers and Ms. Wilson sprang into action, tracking down where the Veteran had lived and where the dog was. After work ended, they got permission from the mother and landlord to gain access to his home to retrieve the dog.

The high-energy puppy had been inside the home alone for more than 24 hours. When Ms. Rogers and Ms. Wilson arrived, she took off running. Ms. Rogers gave chase and caught the dog, taking her home until she was able to find her a new home with a Veteran.

"I have Veterans in my family, and it means a lot to be able to give back. I love serving them. It's an honor," shared Ms. Rogers.



WATCH Maureen and Elizabeth share their story



## 4. A Safe Landing: Project Golden Eagle

People with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can experience distinct biological changes in their brains. These shifts can cause

I am so thrilled I know not just from the side of a nurse, but from the side of the patient, that this is the type of care being provided to hopefully every Veteran out there.

—CATHERINE, VETERAN AIR FORCE CRITICAL CARE NURSE AND VHA PATIENT

different reactions to some medications, including anesthesia. Emergence delirium is when a patient coming out of anesthesia exhibits dangerous behavior to themselves or medical staff.

Bill Pileggi, a CRNA at Pittsburgh VAMC, saw one or two patients each week with emergence delirium. He knew something had to change. Implementing Project Golden Eagle, a medication strategy that eliminates the two most aggravating medicinal agents and replaces them with drugs that are either proven or expected to do better for patients with PTSD, seemed to be the perfect solution.

When Catherine, a former deployed Air Force Critical Care Nurse, needed outpatient surgery, Mr. Pileggi discussed medicine options with her. When the time came for her procedure, he spoke to her calmly and soothingly. She awoke with no signs of emergence delirium.

"It's a simple strategy. We didn't invent it; we just put it together like assembling a puzzle. Since the fall of 2018, we've had no lost IVs, no lost airways, no patient injuries, and no staff injuries. None. Zero," Mr. Pileggi shares.



LEARN MORE about Project Golden Eagle



# Celebrating Success

In 2022, VA nurses received recognition for their contributions to the advancement of nursing practice, the development of life-saving innovations, organizational leadership, and random acts of kindness. They were recognized so many times, we could not possibly list them all. Here is a small sample of the impacts made by VA nurses every day. Congratulations to all for these prestigious honors and for providing excellent care to Veterans!

## Welcome Dr. Saslo as Chief Nursing Officer

Dr. Mark Christopher Saslo, DNS, ARNP-BC, FAANP, assumed the role of Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services/Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) in 2022. He brings more than 30 years of nursing experience, with 20 of those years with the VHA, to this role. As CNO, Dr. Saslo serves as the principal executive for oversight of Care Management & Social Work, Caregiver Support, Chaplain, Geriatrics & Extended Care, Health Outcomes Military Exposures, LGBTQ+ Health, Connected Care, Nursing, Sterile Processing, Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, Pharmacy Benefits Management, Physician Assistants, Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services, and National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Public Health, Health Solutions, Health Equity, and Rural Health.



MARK CHRISTOPHER SASLO

## A Career Pinnacle

Three VA nurses have been selected as distinguished Fellows in the American Academy of Nursing for 2022. Richard Fidler, Ph.D., MBA, CRNA, NP, CHSE; Bernadette Jao, DNP, PMH-BC; and Marianne Shaughnessy, Ph.D., AGPCNP-BC, GS-C, are recognized with this great honor for their significant contributions to health and health care.



RICHARD FIDLER



BERNADETTE JAO



MARIANNE SHAUGHNESSY

## Nurse of the Year

For the second time in three years, a VA nurse has been named ANCC Pathway Nurse of the Year.® Marika Widmann, BSN, RN, MS-BC, received this distinguished acknowledgement for her outstanding contributions and positively impacting her practice environment.



MARIKA WIDMANN

## 2022 Recognition and Awards

**Juliet Aninye, LPN, LVN**

**Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing in the Licensed Practical Nurse Role**

For increasing Veteran utilization of the AvaSure Telesitter program to prevent falls from 47% to 78% through her constant engagement



JULIET ANINYE

**Judith Bourque-Olmstead, Advanced Telehealth Clinical Technician**

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

For leading the way in developing and establishing TeleDermatology, a system that allows providers to assist Veterans in locating and diagnosing skin conditions

**Clinta Che' Reed, PhD, RN, CNL-BC**

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

For developing multiple tools to monitor COVID-19 patient status, employee vaccination compliance, and other COVID-19 related data

**Shimeca Tillis, RN**

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

For demonstrating her leadership acumen in multiple ways, including improving transitions of care and increased enrollment for both Home Telehealth and Congestive Heart Failure clinics



JUDITH BOURQUE-OLMSTEAD



CLINTA CHE' REED



SHIMECA TILLIS



BRENDA SHAFFER



PAUL M. RUSSO



MARIE ROBINSON-MCLAUGHLIN



LETHA JOSEPH



MARIA CIELO-BORRINAGA



BEN VALIENTE



KRISTINE THEIS

**Maria Cielo-Borrinaga, MSN, RN-BC, CNL, CCRN**  
**Ben Valiente, RN, BSN, CCRN-CMC, PCCN**

**American Association of Critical-Care Nurses Circle of Excellence**

For providing quantifiable data that reflects transformative thinking, modeling the key components of a healthy work environment, and achieving measurable results

**Kristine Theis, FNP, MSN**

**American Association of Nurse Practitioners State Award for Excellence**

For contributions as an advocate on behalf of nurse practitioners and their patients



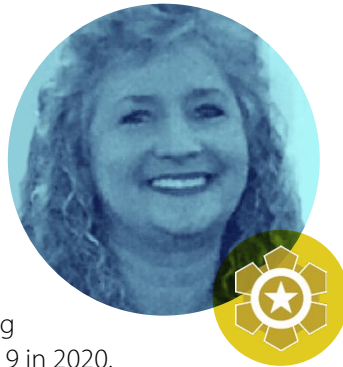
# The Continued Fight Against COVID-19

VHA nurses play a significant role in fighting COVID-19. As trusted professionals, they can help stop the spread of misinformation, provide vaccinations, and care for those infected with the latest treatments. They've done this throughout the pandemic, putting themselves at risk, all to see Veterans safely through this time of crisis.



## The Nurses Who Gave All

ONS recognizes the nurses who gave their lives in the line of service during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their memories will live on because of their commitment, kindness, compassion, and helping Veterans at ultimate risk to themselves. We acknowledge the pain of VHA staff and their families who lost their colleagues and loved ones. We offer our sincerest condolences and will never forget them.



## Nurse Legion of Honor Medal

Cindy Jones, a former Birmingham VA Health Care System licensed practical nurse, was recognized in 2022 with the Nurse Legion of Honor Medal by the Alabama State Nurses Association. Ms. Jones worked on the frontlines, risking her safety, as she nursed Veterans living in the Gadsden, Alabama, community. Her dedicated care for her patients ended in her making the ultimate sacrifice when she succumbed to COVID-19 in 2020.

Watch Nancy Phillips, APRN, explain the importance of vaccines.

In 2022, **169,427** COVID-19 vaccines and boosters were administered as of October 2022.



## Remembering How it All Began

It's important to remember the beginning of the pandemic, and the uphill battle VHA nurses faced. Paola Soler, RN at James J. Peters VA Medical Center, is one of the countless nurses who rose to the challenge during the unbearably stressful days of the early pandemic. Battling a lack of PPE, shortage of staff, negative pressure rooms, and trying to keep one patient alive while

another patient was actively coding, all while worried about catching the virus herself,

Ms. Soler went above and beyond to help a young man in the ICU. Before iPads were available for COVID-19 patients to see and speak with relatives, Ms. Soler took it upon herself to Facetime his wife and one-year-old son every morning and evening. The Veteran couldn't talk because of intubation, but he would squeeze Ms. Soler's hand to communicate with his family. He became that VAMC's first successful extubation and discharge of COVID-19, thanks to Ms. Soler's care of not only his physical body but his soul.

If you hear me and love me, squeeze your nurse's hand.

—WIFE OF CRITICAL COVID-19 PATIENT

# A Nursing Legend Retires: Dr. Beth Taylor, DHA, RN, NEA-C, FAAN

In 2022, we celebrated and bid farewell to our leader, colleague, and friend, Dr. Beth Taylor, on her well-deserved VA retirement. Through her visionary, passionate, and dedicated focus, Dr. Taylor strengthened the posture of VA nursing, leaving it resilient and more cohesive as a profession.



In addition to leading VA nursing through the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Taylor was instrumental in ensuring that nursing was represented at the highest level of leadership for executive decision-making across and throughout VHA. By "leaning in," she not only transformed but also elevated the nursing leadership role, strengthening clinical and executive-level decision-making outcomes.

While serving as Chief Nursing Officer, Dr. Taylor was promoted and appointed as VA's Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services, the first time in the history of Veteran care a nurse leader held such a position of authority and influence.

In addition to these accomplishments, Dr. Taylor also:

- » Led the development of the 2022 VHA Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan
- » Championed legislation for the National Standards of Practice across 50 different professional occupations, and for the successful enactment of the R.A.I.S.E. Act and Federal Supremacy, paving the way to achieve cross-national U.S. healthcare practice in their health care profession
- » Advocated for enterprise-wide nursing EBPs with an aspirational goal to have a Nurse Scientist in each facility

During her VA tenure, Dr. Taylor was awarded a Fellowship in the American Academy of Nursing in recognition of her longstanding and highly impactful influence on the nursing profession. Dr. Taylor's leadership consistently championed clinical nursing practice, evidence-based decision-making, modernizing the nursing workforce, educating nurses and patients, and nursing research. Her work supporting nurses as clinical leaders will have a lasting effect as VA grows the next generation of nursing leaders.

Across the nation, VHA nurses work tirelessly to serve those who served. Hear from nurses why they do what they do. Watch nurses share their stories here.

I take care of them like they are the only person there.

—PATRICIA IKEM  
NURSE PRACTITIONER

## A NOTE ABOUT THE IMAGES IN THIS REPORT:

Wherever possible, the 2022 ONS Annual Report depicts photographs of current frontline VHA nurses. These faces from the field represent the diverse nursing workforce who all have one thing in common: a mission to provide the highest quality of care to Veterans at the largest healthcare system in the country.

The nurses on the front and back covers and the table of contents page represent the following VA Medical Centers:

- » Hershel "Woody" Williams VA Medical Center, Huntington, WV
- » Hampton VA Medical Center, Hampton, VA
- » Fayetteville VA Medical Center, Fayetteville, NC
- » Galveston County VA Clinic, Galveston, TX
- » VA North Texas Healthcare System, Dallas, TX
- » Allentown VA Clinic, Allentown, PA
- » West Palm Beach VA Medical Center, West Palm Beach, FL
- » James J. Peters VA Medical Center, Bronx, NY
- » Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, Charleston, SC
- » VA Greater Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA
- » Bruce W. Carter Department of VA Medical Center, Miami, FL





## To Our Nurses, Thank You!

Words are not enough to express gratitude for your daily dedication, caring with compassion, hard work, and perseverance. You have shown ongoing bravery through the most difficult of times. We honor you and all you do for Veterans.

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration

