

VA Northwest Health Network | VISN 20

# Advancing Nursing, Transforming Healthcare



Annual Report | Chief Nursing Office | FY 2024

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs



# Message from CNO Leadership Team

VA Nurses have been providing exceptional nursing care to Veterans and families for over 100 years. I am honored to lead an exceptional workforce of physicians, nurses, and administrative staff who help foster a sense of community and support by recognizing their commitment to upholding values of quality, safety, and outstanding service within the VISN 20 healthcare network.

VISN 20 staff are shining brighter than ever before. They continuously grow, strategize, and improve for one reason — to care for Veterans and their families to help improve their quality of life. I am proud the meaningful difference our programs have made, a big “Thank you” to all the individual staff and programs we have that support our eight Health Care Systems and the Veterans they serve.



Terisa Sjue-Loring, MN, RN  
Chief Nursing Officer  
VISN 20



Kristi Johnson, MN, RN  
Deputy Chief Nursing Officer  
VISN 20

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# Introduction

The VISN 20 Chief Nursing Office provides a variety of clinical services to Veterans and Caregivers that encompass the VA's mission to "Serve Those Who Served". CNO Leadership is dedicated to advancing health by providing access to care with an unmatched focus on quality, safety, and exceptional service, this includes building and maintaining a strong nursing workforce.

Strategic planning is integral to reimagining and optimizing a future nursing workforce and program needs VISN wide. Collaboration with VISN and facility nursing leadership continues to be a critical step when setting strategic direction and working toward decision-making processes to pave the path toward transformation. CNO programs include the Centralized Eligibility Appointment Team, Caregiver Support Program, EHRM, Clinical Resource Hub, Geriatrics and Extended Care, Informatics, Sterile Processing, Telehealth, Veterans Experience Office, VA Health Connect (Clinical Contact Center), and Western States Network Consortium (WSNC) Nursing Scholarship Program.

# About VISN 20



VISN 20, the VA Northwest Health Network, includes the states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, most of Idaho and one county each in Montana and California. We cover 817,417 square miles, approximately 23% of the US. We manage over 471,450 unique Veterans, with a population of approximately one million, a budget of \$5.6 billion, and approximately 17,800 employees. As of the end of FY 23, 42.2% of enrollees and 39.7% of patients resided in rural or highly rural areas. The VISN is also home to 273 federally recognized American Indian/Alaskan Native tribes, 229 of which reside in Alaska.

Our eight facilities currently operate 1,052 inpatient beds for acute medical/surgical, mental health, nursing home and rehabilitative care. In FY 23, our facilities recorded 3,684,494 outpatient visits at 46 Community Based Outpatient Clinics, five Medical Centers, and one Health Care Center. We also offer rehabilitative and long-term care in six Domiciliary Programs and six Community Living Centers.



**Regardless of where the program reports within the VISN, we are one team...**

— Terisa Sjue-Loring, MN, RN

# Programs and Services

## Centralized Eligibility and Appeals Team (CEAT)



**Thomas Caldwell, MD**  
CEAT Director

Our VISN 20 Centralized Eligibility and Appeals Team (CEAT) has been in existence since the Caregiver Support Program (CSP) expansion in 2020. CEAT makes eligibility decisions for PCAFC applications for all VISN 20 facilities, as well as, appeal decisions for alternate VISNs across the Western States Network Consortium (WSNC). CEAT is an interdisciplinary team of Physicians, Nurse Practitioner, Psychologists, Nurses, Social Workers, Occupational Therapists and Administrative Support Personnel. FY 24 to date, CEAT has made eligibility decisions on 1500 applications. VISN 20 CEAT is led by Dr. Thomas Caldwell, Medical Director, and Phillip Atkins, APRN, Chief Nurse.

CEAT continues efforts to build consistency in decision making, as well as, expanding the body of work to include remands. The program completed their third national consistency exercise with outcomes closely matched with national CSP. The team has also completed additional training in remands and have been working those since Fall of 2023.

## Caregiver Support Program (CSP)



**Victoria Koehler, LCSW**  
Caregiver Support  
Program Lead

The Caregiver Support Program (CSP) mission statement is "The program's mission is to promote the health and well-being of Family Caregivers who care for our Nation's Veterans through education, resources, support, and services". VISN 20 has 1550 Veterans with an active Primary Family Caregiver and over 1700 active Caregivers participating in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). Additionally, the program has over 1200 Caregivers participating in the Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS). CSP has seen significant growth since program expansion in 2020. VISN 20's Caregiver Support Program is led by Victoria Koehler, MSW, LCSW.

The Caregiver Support Program is extremely grateful for the incredible partnership with CSP facility leadership and overall engagement across all departments and programs at each facility who are engaged and motivated to provide the best care to Caregivers and Veterans.

# VA Health Connect and Clinical Contact Center (CCC)



**Kristi Funk**, Director



**Angela Smart, MSN, RN**  
Chief of Clinical Operations



**Travis Defensor, PharmD, SCACP**  
Chief of Pharmacy



**Christine Cole, MSN, RN**  
Informatics Nurse



**Ian Smith**  
Chief of Business Operations

## Nurse Triage

The Clinical Contact Nurse Triage is led by Angela Smart and supports all eight facilities to including their CBOCs. CCC nurses triage all Veterans and determine the appropriate route of care needed. They facilitate communication between patients and their providers for continuity of care. During FY 24, clinical leadership collaborated with Integrated Clinical Community to establish the Respiratory Call Center, Woman's Health Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), and the Same Day Mental Health SOP. The team also implemented and is utilizing the CRM Health Record successfully on all four Vista sites, as well as, establishing the Tele-Emergency Care program which began in June 2024 and is exceeding all national metrics.

## Pharmacy

VA Health Connect Pharmacy Service is managed by Travis Defensor, and comprised of pharmacy technicians and clinical pharmacists with the goal of providing support for all medication-related matters. For FY 24, Pharmacy's action plan included a decrease in average handle time (AHT) from 7.5 minutes to 6.5 minutes, reduction in "not ready" percentage (NR%) from 30% to 22%. Puget Sound Health Care System was added to pharmacy coverage on May 6, 2024. This completed the coverage needed to provide a consistent experience to all Veterans in VISN 20 for VA Health Connect Pharmacy Services.

## Informatics

The Clinical Contact Center Informatics Service is led by a Nurse Informaticist, Christine Cole, who supports all service lines within the CCC. The team is responsible for all quality management, patient safety and satisfaction, Veteran and staff education, and data analysis needs for the CCC. They also monitor metrics; including average speed of answer, average handle time, abandonment rate, and work with each service line on process improvement projects with the goal of improving the Veteran experience. Some of the FY 24 goals include ramping up the quality evaluations of staff calls and working more closely with all facilities within VISN 20 toward standardization for more efficiency and to educate staff and Veterans about services offered.



**The Clinical Contact Nurse Triage supports all eight facilities to include their CBOCs. CCC nurses triage all VISN 20 Veterans and determine the appropriate route of care needed.**

— Angela Smart MSN, RN

## Clinical Resource Hub



**Rebekah Lee, MHA,  
MBA, PA-C, FACHE**  
CRH Director

The VISN 20 Clinical Resource Hub (CRH) is a comprehensive resource that spans across the entire VISN, providing support to all eight facilities. It offers a wide range of services across multiple disciplines. CRH's primary and traditional focus areas include providing temporary or "gap" coverage for Primary Care and Mental Health services. In addition, the team offers longer-term coverage for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention, Caregiver Support, Specialty Care, Pharmacy, and Nursing services.

During FY 24, CRH made significant efforts to enhance the utilization of Tele-Pain services and optimize Mental Health services across the supported sites within the VISN. These initiatives aim to improve access and provide high-quality care to the Veteran population. With optimizing Mental Health services throughout the VISN, and supports initiatives such as: increasing mental health resources, implementing evidence-based practices, and improving care coordination to better meet the mental health needs of Veterans.

CRH set specific goals to achieve by the end FY 24. These goals included adding gap Chaplaincy, expanding Caregiver Support and standardizing processes and communication. By setting these goals, the CRH demonstrated its commitment to continuous improvement and providing comprehensive support to Veterans and their caregivers, and ensure Veterans receive the highest quality of care within VISN 20.

## Telehealth Program



**Peter Shore, PsyD**  
Director of Telehealth

The VISN 20 Telehealth Program plays a pivotal role in driving the expansion of telehealth services across multiple facilities. With a dedicated team comprising Facilitators, Facility Telehealth Coordinators, and Telehealth Technicians, the Team is focused on key initiatives aimed at enhancing and increasing Telehealth services in FY 24. Key initiatives included the establishment of new programs through stakeholder Telehealth Service Agreements, including the V20 Tele Emergency Care program in collaboration with VISN 20 Health Connect to broaden telehealth options for Veterans and supporting newly developed National Designated Telehealth programs.

The VISN 20 Telehealth team was involved in collaboration and coordination with 300+ telehealth clinics and specialties. They assisted in the development and implementation of an action plan to provide Veterans with a choice in care delivery. After much effort, VISN 20 was the recipient of special funding for 22 new telehealth positions throughout the VISN's facilities to increase access to care. This resulted in a commendable 5.8% increase in telehealth episodes of care. The VISN 20 Telehealth team remains committed to expanding access to quality care and leveraging technology to meet the evolving needs of Veterans across the network.



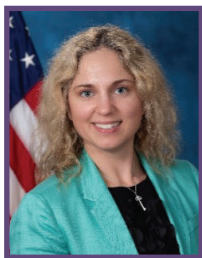
**Sara Maspaitella**  
Deputy Director  
of Telehealth



**The Telehealth Program plays a pivotal role in driving the expansion of telehealth services across multiple facilities.**

— Peter Shore, PsyD

# Electronic Health Records Management (EHRM)



**Ashley Phillips, MN, RN**  
EHRM Project Director



**Patrick Spoutz,  
PharmD, BCPS**  
EHRM Pharmacy Team



**Michael McDonald**  
EHRM HTM Team



**Anna Smith, MN, RN**  
EHRM Coordination Team



**Falissa Prout, MN, RN**  
EHRM Informatics Team

Given the shifts at the national level and within VHA, EHRM adapted and evolved to better meet the current expectations of the EHRM program and effectively support local sites. To align with the evolving landscape, several changes within the VISN 20 EHRM Teams were implemented. The “VISN 20 EHRM Deployment Team” is now the “VISN 20 EHRM Coordination Team”. Recognizing that the Deployment Team’s scope of work goes beyond deployment activities, the team was renamed to accurately reflect the diverse tasks they handle at various stages of record conversion. Additionally, during FY 24 the VISN EHRM Education Department was developed to help fill the identified gaps. They are engaged with the live sites and services who are already using the new EHR system. Furthermore, the relocation of the Informatics Team under the CNO Service line will facilitate collaboration and streamline workflow enhance its capabilities and ensure alignment with program goals. The EHRM Coordination Team is led by Ms. Anna Smith, VISN 20 EHRM Integrator Specialist.

The Deployment Lead role also evolved significantly during FY 24 with additional responsibilities at the national level. Because of these additional duties and scope of work, this role moved out of the Deployment Team, allowing more focus on National and VISN-specific needs. This realignment also allowed the Deployment Team to concentrate on direct collaboration with our field teams. Ms. Ashley Phillips’s new title is VISN 20 EHRM Project Director.



**It was essential for all teams to work together to implement these changes and adapt to the EHRM program’s new demands, enhance all team’s capabilities, and prepare for future initiatives.**

— Ashley Phillips, MN, RN

The EHRM Coordination Team continues to provide customer service to VISN 20 Live Sites, other VISNs, and with national partners as it relates to Issue and Risk Management. The Team is currently managing over 481 risks and issues from the live sites and VISN Services such as CRH and the Clinical Contact Center (CCC). The team provides an avenue to escalate issues that impact Veteran care. They also support the standardization effort, reset work, and EHRM patient safety. They have also directly supported FHCC’s go-live with unknown queue trainings, along with sharing lessons learned. The team is working toward having an enhanced understanding of the standardization effort and how the VISN and sites can be incorporated into the VHA effort.

There are several communication pathways to lead the way and meet customer needs. The EHRM HTM Team is led by VISN 20 Healthcare Technology Management Chief, Michael McDonald. The EHRM Pharmacy Team is led by VISN 20 Pharmacy Executive, Patrick Spoutz. The EHRM Informatics Team was led by VISN 20 Informatics, Falissa Prout. During FY 24, the tiered governance process and Hub model was stood up, both at the VISN level and live sites, with the goal of 100% adoption to all eight Facilities agnostic of the medical record use. It was essential for all teams to work together to implement these changes and adapt to the EHRM program’s new demands, enhance all team’s capabilities, and prepare for future initiatives.

## Informatics



**Robert Briseño, MSN,  
RN, NI-BC, CPHIMS**  
Chief Nursing  
Informatics Officer

Nursing Informatics joined the CNO Team during FY 24. The team exercises their leadership in the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of hardware and software applications integrated with the electronic health records (EHR) and associated programs and applications. The team collaborates with VHA programs and service leaders at the facilities, VISN networks, and all levels of Veteran Affairs (VA) staff nationwide. Nursing Informatics provides content management, application support, health information technology system optimization, enterprise data management, business architecture management, partnership management, requirements management, and change management.

## Sterile Processing



**Erika Sutton, MaED,  
BSN, RN CRMST**  
Chief Sterile  
Processing Officer

Sterile Processing Services (SPS) is a vital department within VISN 20 healthcare facilities, ensuring the safety of our Veterans and VA staff healthcare workers by providing sterile reusable medical devices (RMD) for all medical procedures. The functions of SPS includes but is not limited to the following: Cleaning and Sterilization, Instrument Processing, Decontamination, Preparation and Packaging, Sterilization, and Storage and Distribution.

The Importance of SPS plays a critical role in preventing healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) by ensuring the sterility of RMD. Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness is also a result of efficient SPS operations by ensuring the availability of sterile RMD when needed, preventing delays in procedures, and optimizing resource utilization.

FY 24 VISN 20 SPS Goals included implementing the Joint Commission AMP Tracer Tool in the Sterile Processing Department and Clinical Areas Eliminating Paper Use in SPS and Decreasing Non-Conformities in SPS and Clinical Areas.

## Geriatric and Extended Care



**Jennifer Spiker  
MS, RN, CNL**  
Geriatric and  
Extended Care Officer

Geriatric and Extended Care includes Adult Day Health Care, Community Nursing Homes (CNH), Community Residential Care, Geriatric Patient Aligned Care Team, Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC), Homemaker Home Health Aide, Medical Foster Home (MFH), Palliative and Hospice Care, Skilled Home Health Care, State Veterans Homes, VA Community Living Centers (CLC), and Veteran Directed Care (VDC). In VISN 20, the Geriatric and Extended Care Officer (GECO), Jennifer Spiker works closely with Network and facility leaders to incorporate new concepts and programs. The VISN 20 GECO also develops mechanisms to evaluate and monitor the quality, safety, and efficiency of these programs.

VISN 20 offers the highest level of care within the CLCs and HBPC programs. This is done through interdisciplinary team dedication while delivering skilled, rehab, memory, and hospice care to our Veterans. These programs have gathered Age Friendly recognition, a whole health clinical approach that centers care around what matters most to the Veteran. Much of GEC's direction is for care to be delivered where the Veteran lives, specifically in Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) with an aging in place focus.

## Veteran Experience Office



**Katina Collins**  
Veterans Experience  
Officer

The Veteran Patient Experience Office (VEO) is responsible for sharing and reinforcing the core values, characteristics, and customer experience principles of VA to employees who help underscore their commitment to Veterans, their families, and other beneficiaries. The office analyzes feedback data (SHEP/VSignals/SAIL/PATS) from Veterans to help identify opportunities for improvement specific areas such as provider ratings, communication, overall satisfaction and cleanliness. The Veterans Experience Office and Patient Advocacy is led by Veterans Experience Officer, Katina Collins. The VEO also works closely with the My HealtheVet program.

The Patient Advocate program assists Veterans who are seeking help with getting resolution for a concern. The program also captures compliments for staff who have provided care to Veteran patients. Each interaction with the VA Secretary, White House Hotline, Congressional, Call Centers, and Telehealth, is reviewed, tracked and sent to a facility for response. Quarterly audits are done to ensure accurate use of PATS, monthly reports are shared with VISN, facility and service line leaders. During FY 24 the Veteran Patient Experience Office decreased the number of days to close out PATS requests by 2% which means Veterans are receiving resolution faster.

## WSNC Scholarship Program



**Simone Rich, RN**  
WSNC Scholarship  
Coordinator

The National Nursing Education Incentive (NNEI) Scholarship Program is a fantastic opportunity for nurses in the Western States Network Consortium to expand their professional education. This program is one of the three scholarship programs under the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) umbrella, and it provides lifetime funding of up to \$46,300 for nurses pursuing an advanced degree. Additionally, nurses can receive assistance from the newly appointed Program Coordinator who guides them through the process.

The NNEI program is unique in that it is funded by the Under Secretary for Health, and can only be used for nurses attempting to obtain an advanced degree. Once a candidate is awarded the scholarship, the funds are transferred to the VISN, and can only be used for that candidate. This ensures that the scholarship money is used only for the intended purpose. Since its implementation in January of 2023, the total program has increased to 19 applicants. The program's goal for FY 24 was to increase awareness of the scholarship across the WSNC by assisting at least four new candidates for the next school year.

## Nurse Qualification Standards Field Advisory Committee



**Collyn West, RN,  
MSN, CNL, PCCN**  
Nurse Qualification Standards  
(NQS) Field Advisory  
Committee (FAC) Chair

The Standards (NQS) Field Advisory Committee (FAC) was established when the Nurse Professional Standards Board (NPSB) abolished. Collyn West has been appointed as the NQS FAC Chair to assist with disseminating information from the Office of Nursing services back down to each facility NQS Station Advisory Committees (SAC). Collyn and the facility's NQS SAC will also serve as subject matter experts to help supervisors in VISN 20 navigate the evaluation, promotion, and probationary review processes.

# Strategic Goals Supporting VHA 10-Year Vision for Nursing

Within VISN 20 we align with the National VHA Nursing Workforce Strategic Plan by focusing on four pillars with specific strategies to ensure a strong nursing workforce to meet the four statutory missions of VA. These four pillars are:

- 1 Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice**
- 2 Strengthen the Nursing Workforce**
- 3 Reimagining Lifelong Learning and Career Development**
- 4 Inspiring an Industry Leading Culture**

These pillars are built on the foundational principles including: High Reliability Organization, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access/Accessibility, and Integrity Commitment Advocacy Respect Excellence. The strategies and priorities associated with these four pillars align with the VA Strategic Plan/HR Future Planning and the Employee Engagement Framework, VA Secretary Staffing Priorities, Under Secretary for Health VHA Priorities and Enablers, the VHA Long Range Strategic Framework, as well as the recruitment and retention strategies outlined in the VHA Nursing Occupations Workforce Resources Blueprint.

## Optimizing 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.

## Reimagining Lifelong Learning

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 of Evidence Based Practice initiatives.

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'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.

VHA benefits, compensation, and workplace environment outpace the private sector.

## Strengthening the Nursing Workforce

Optimizing and Informing Nursing Practice

Reimagining Lifelong Learning

Veterans

Inspiring an Industry Leading Culture

VHA employs an industry-leading shared governance model across all settings of care.

VHA nursing is the gold-standard globally for innovative health care delivery, maximizing value to the community, Veterans, and the healthcare industry by leveraging technology, creativity, and flexibility.

## Inspiring an Industry Leading Culture

# VISN 20 Priorities



Hire Faster and  
More Competitively

1



Connect Veterans to  
the Soonest and Best Care

2



Serve Veterans with Military  
Environmental Exposures

3



Accelerate our Journey  
to High Reliability

4



Support Veterans Whole Health,  
their Caregivers, and Survivors

5



Prevent Veteran Suicide

6

# VISN 20 CNO Team Accomplishments

## FY 24 Onboarding and Growth

### All VISN 20 Nurses

- Nurse's Onboard FY 24: 3976
- Net Change from FY 23 to FY 24: 64
- VISN Onboard and Growth Rate FY 23 vs. FY 24: 1.6%

### All VISN 20 Practical Nurses

- Practical Nurse's Onboard FY 24: 581
- Net Change from FY 23 to FY 24: 3
- VISN Onboard and Growth Rate FY 23 vs. FY 24: 0.5%

### All VISN Nursing Assistants

- Practical Nursing Assistants Onboard FY 24: 395
- Net Change from FY 23 to FY 24: 13
- VISN Onboard and Growth Rate FY 23 vs. FY 24: 3.4%

\*Report Source: WMC Dashboard- Onboard, Growth, and Net Change Hires, Growth, Losses - Power BI (powerbigov.us)

## Serve Veterans with Military Environmental Exposures

- Utilizing the Traveling Nurse Corps Program through ONS to assist with PACT support.
- NESSU and CRH assisted with screenings.

## Accelerate Our Journey to High Reliability

- Sharing HRO Moments and "Good Catches" during team meetings.
- Staff completing HRO Training.

## Support Veterans Whole Health, Caregivers, and Survivors

- The CRH recognizes the critical role of caregivers in supporting Veterans and aims to expand Caregiver Support services to all eight facilities within the VISN.
- The CRH to add gap Chaplaincy support. This addition recognizes the importance of spiritual care in the overall well-being of Veterans and aims to ensure that there is comprehensive support available to address their spiritual and emotional needs.
- Caregiver Support Program Goals include One Plan, Wellness Contacts and Mental Health and Respite for Caregivers. One Plan includes specific activities for Education and Support, Resources and Referrals, Outreach, Collaboration and Partnership and Strong Practice.
- Total Caregiver Support Applications received for FY 24 (as of July 2024): 2,444.

## Connecting Veterans to Care

- CRH yielded a 25% increase in the number of unique Veterans seen by the end of the second quarter compared to the same period last fiscal year.
- 5.98% increase in telehealth episodes of care comparing FY 23 to FY 24 YTD.
- Implementation of Tele Emergency Care (Tele-EC) Program on 6/6/24. The program has seen over 600 patients as of 8/30/24.
- With the availability of Tele-EC Program, numbers of patients referred to the ED has decreased to 39.9%.
- CCC growth in calls, appointments scheduled and health chat encounters within 6 months of FY 24.



904,791 Veteran calls, increased by 138,486 compared to last year.

- Expanding GEC Programs to expand to improve Veteran Care with an Aging in Place focus. Includes Community Residential Care, Geriatric Patient Aligned Care Team, Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC), Homemaker Home Health Aide, Medical Foster Home (MFH), and Veteran Directed Care (VDC).
- CCC built collaborative partnerships between nursing and pharmacy, nursing and MSA's, nursing and program providers, to provide the right care at the right time.

## Prevent Veteran Suicide

- CCC standardized processes across the VISN on Triage flow for Same day Mental Health SOP in support of the Mental Health initiative.
- CRH hired two SUD Psychologists for Specialty Mental Health.

# Collaborations to Improve Care

## Follow Your Heart Project

Blood Pressure Management was identified as an opportunity for improvement after all eight facilities were analyzed, and four metrics were consistent across all sites in the 5th quintile of SAIL performance. Seven medical centers elected this measure to target as a collective improvement project. During the June 2023 Governing Board, a commitment was made to improve blood pressure management.

The Follow Your Heart Project is to prevent Veterans from having undiagnosed hypertension and morbidity and mortality risks. The project goal and AIM statement was to achieve greater than or equal to 70% blood pressure management by the end of the fourth quarter of FY 24. This goal was achieved by improving blood pressure management for more than 10% of Veteran patients. This was a huge lift by the VISN 20 Pharmacy Benefits Manager (PBM) Academic Team.

This collaborative workgroup help achieved this effort by dividing it into five primary drivers. Each of those were led by leadership and coordination of the Executive Leadership Team.

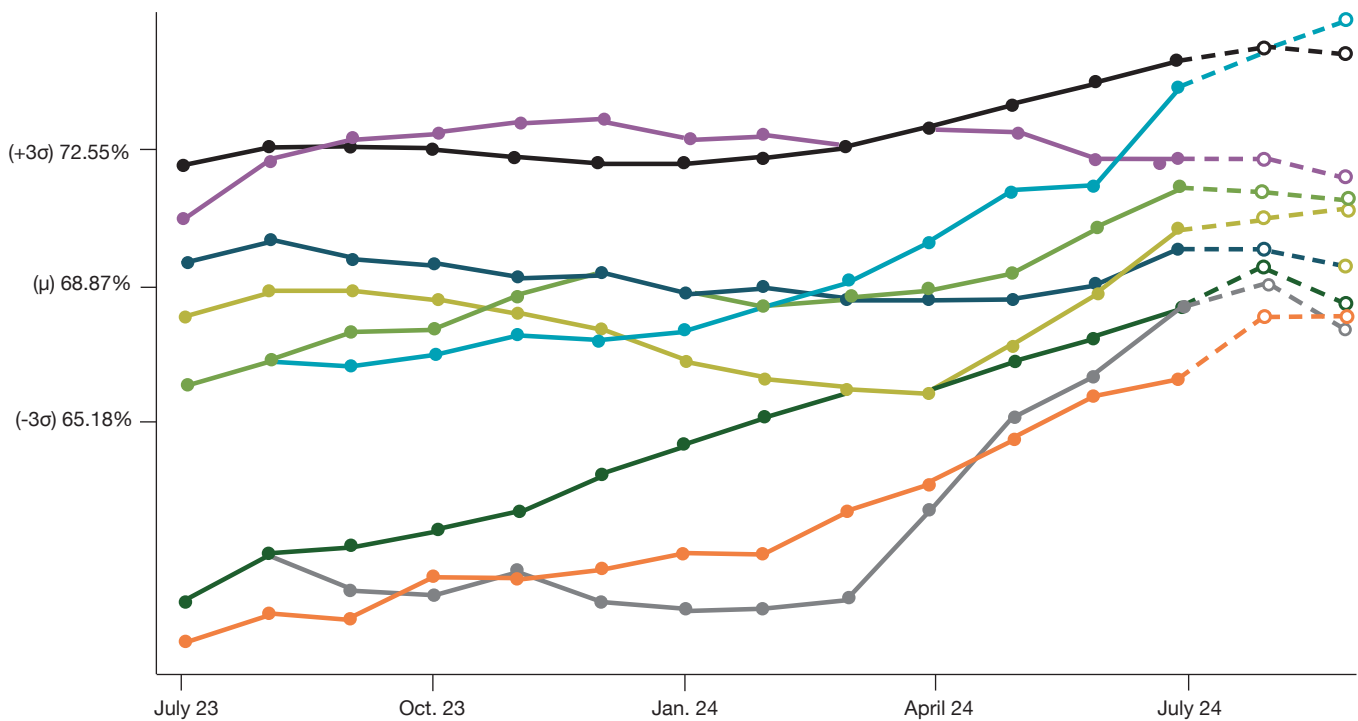


### Primary Drivers:

- 1 Improve Risk Awareness:** Notify Veterans of increased BP risk awareness and identify Veteran audiences to notify of the risk.
- 2 Management of Hypertension (HTN) I or II Diagnosis and Treatment:** Step by step identification and management of HTN and Women Veteran clinical guidance: material HTN.
- 3 Educate/Myth Bust BP Range:** Designate local pharmacist champions POC's and Veteran focused education on treatment of hypertension risks.
- 4 Strengthen BP Measuring Practices:** Enhance ordering and shipment of home cuffs and Metric/Data Understanding.
- 5 EHR Documentation and Data Management:** Confirm and communicate metric abstract details and address barriers to Cerner Telehealth BP capture.

This project also contributes to the Million Hearts Campaign, a national initiative by the American Heart Association to reduce morbidity and mortality outcomes associated with uncontrolled, unmanaged, and undiagnosed hypertension, reduce duplication of efforts, and work together to prevent a Veteran from walking around with a "silent killer" (HTN).

# Percentage of Patients Who Met Blood Pressure Goal



The project goal was to achieve greater than or equal to 70% blood pressure management for VISN 20 by the end of the 4th quarter of FY 24. This goal was achieved by improving blood pressure management for more than 10% of Veteran patients within VISN 20.

— Jill Friend, Interim Quality and Patient Safety Officer

## Locations

- Anchorage, AK
- Boise, ID
- Portland, OR
- Roseburg, OR
- Puget Sound, WA
- Spokane, WA
- Walla Walla, WA
- White City, OR
- National

# VISN 20 Nursing Excellence Awards

## Awardees and National Nominees

The VA Secretary's Awards in Nursing Excellence program, established in 1984, annually honors one Medical Center Director, Nurse Executive (NE), Registered Nurse (RN) in a staff nurse role and one in a non-staff nurse role; i.e., Advanced Practice Nurse, Nurse Manager, Instructor, Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)/Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN), and a Nursing Assistant (NA) actively engaged in the care of patients at a VA Medical Center (VAMC). The recipients' contributions to the care of patients in any VA health care setting are patient-driven and demonstrate such excellence as to merit recognition from peers. This award is given only once to an individual.

In preparation of this very special recognition, nurses from all eight facilities are nominated by their leadership teams and compete at the VISN level. The VISN 20 Awardees are voted on and selected by the Nurse Executives in VISN 20, then elevated and submitted for the National Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing. This competition is exceptionally keen. All awardees' accomplishments are noteworthy, recognized, and celebrated during local Nurses Month Award Ceremonies.

### Alaska VA Health Care System



**William Hunter, LPN**  
Awardee for LPN Role  
*Also pictured: Francisco Hurtado,  
ADPCS /Chief Nurse Executive (left)*



**Jennifer Tolliver, RN**  
Awardee for RN Role



**Michelle Denny, RN**  
Awardee for RN  
in Expanded Role

## Boise VA Health Care System



**Jerm Imani, LPN**

Awardee for LPN Role

*Also pictured: Angelina Knesel, Associate Director of Patient Care Services/Chief Nurse Executive (middle) and David Wood, Medical Center Director for Boise VAMC (far right)*



**Tracy Feulner, RN**

Awardee for RN Role



**Andrea Lambe, RN**

Awardee for RN in Expanded Role

## Portland VA Health Care System



**Josephine Loring, CNA**

Awardee for CNA, NA, HT Role and Nominee for National VA Secretary Award

*Also pictured: Terisa Sjue-Loring, VISN 20 CNO (left) and Kristi Johnson, VISN 20 Deputy CNO (right)*



**Danielle Tristan, LPN**

Awardee for LPN Role

*Also pictured: Clare O'Geary, Deputy Director for Patient Care Services/Chief Nurse Executive (left of Awardee) and Jessica Flanary, Deputy Nurse Executive (right)*



**Jeff Nesbitt, RN**

Awardee for RN Role



**Nicole Russo, RN**

Awardee for RN in Expanded Role

## VA Puget Sound Health Care System



### Linda Hwang, RN

Awardee for RN Role and Nominee for National VA Secretary Award  
Also pictured: Geri L'Heureux, Deputy Director for Patient Care Services/ Chief Nurse Executive (far left)



### Awardees Not Pictured

**Quyen Nguyen, HT**  
CNA, NA, HT R

**Barb Dibble, LPN**  
LPN Role

**Jennifer Lamb, RN**  
RN on Expanded Role

## Roseburg VA Health Care System



### Awardees Not Pictured

**Judy Mouser, NA**  
CNA, NA, HT Role

**Amber Delorme, LPN**  
LPN Role



**Abby McEnroe, RN**  
Awardee for RN Role



**Jessica McAndrew, RN**  
Awardee for RN in Expanded Role and Nominee for National VA Secretary Award

## Spokane VA Health Care System



**Karla Linton, LPN**

Awardee for LPN Role and Nominee  
for National VA Secretary Award



### Awardees Not Pictured

**Quyen Nguyen, HT**  
CNA, NA, HT Role

**Barb Dibble, LPN**  
LPN Role

**Jennifer Lamb, RN**  
RN on Expanded Role

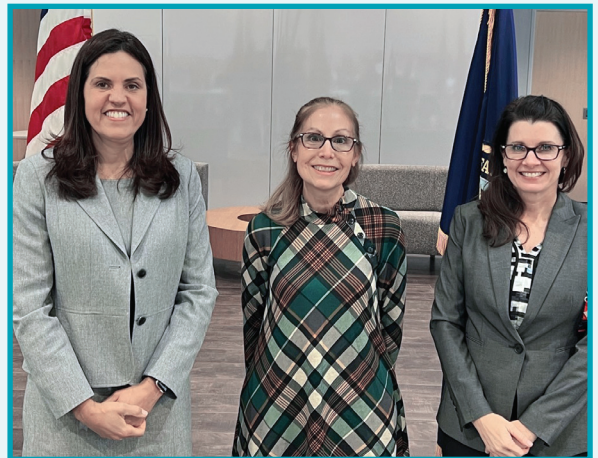
## VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics



**Lora Traub, LPN**  
LPN Role



**Elizabeth Candelaria, RN**  
RN Role



**Melanie Olivas, RN**

Awardee for RN in Expanded Role  
*Also pictured: Tanya Bradsher, Deputy Secretary (left)  
and Dr. Cellura, Medical Center Director (right)*



This competition is exceptionally keen. All awardees' accomplishments are noteworthy and recognized and celebrated during the local Nurses Month Award Ceremonies at all eight facilities.

— Terisa Sjue-Loring, MN, RN

## Walla Walla VA Health Care System



**Viviana Bautista, HT**

Awardee for CNA, NA, HT Role

*Also pictured: April Hughes, Associate Director for Patient Care Services/Chief Nurse Executive (right)*



**Jennifer Norris, LPN**

Awardee for LPN Role



**Brittney Bennett, RN**

Awardee for RN Role



**Kirsten Borges, RN**

Awardee for RN  
in Expanded Role

# 2024 National Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing

This year, VISN 20 nominee, **Josephine Loring**, was selected for the Nursing Assistant Role and honored nationally for the Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing. Josephine has become a pillar of compassion and ingenuity in caring for Veterans facing severe mental health crises and neurocognitive decline at the VA Portland Healthcare System. Her approach blends empathy with a knack for creative problem-solving, making her a trusted figure among patients and colleagues. Josephine's extraordinary care includes hours of bedside support, using personalized methods like reading, music, and massage to comfort and engage Veterans. Beyond her clinical excellence, Ms. Loring is deeply invested in her professional development, contributing as a Group Leader for Mental Health Inpatient Treatment and excelling as a Prevention and Management of Disruptive Behavior trainer, significantly impacting patient and staff safety. Her dedication to advancing her nursing education while working full-time exemplifies her commitment to the nursing profession and her aspiration for continual growth and improvement. Her colleagues recognize her as a vital team player known for her reliability and ability to handle complex situations with grace and professionalism.



Denis R. McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs (left), Josephine Loring, CNA, VA Portland Health Care System (center) and Dr. Christopher Saslo, Assistant Under Secretary for Patient Care Services/Chief Nursing Officer (right)



**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

