

VA**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**Veterans Health Administration
VA Healthcare—VISN 4

VISION

for Excellence

*Newsletter for Veterans and Stakeholders in VISN 4***Issue 34**

Never too late to fight the flu

The flu shot is your best protection against the flu. Everyone age six months and older should get the flu vaccine. If you are a Veteran enrolled in VA health care, visit your nearest VA facility for a free flu shot.

If you have already received a flu shot outside of VA, don't forget to let your VA health care provider know.

Learn more about flu vaccines and why you should get vaccinated at <https://www.prevention.va.gov/flu/>.

VA also offers updated COVID-19 vaccines at no cost for Veterans receiving care at VA. Due to changes in the virus and waning immunity, these updated vaccines protect against newer strains of COVID-19.

Learn more about COVID-19 vaccines at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>.



Inside this issue:

Central Fabrication Prosthetics Lab

We highlight U. S. Army Veteran Jeff Kinnan. He explains how our new prosthetics lab provides the highest level of orthotic and prosthetics needs for our Veterans.

Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of VISN 4:

It's my pleasure to share a few of our accomplishments across VISN 4 over the past few months.

Our staff continued to find new ways to reach out and serve Veterans with military environmental exposures. As of November 30, a total of 224,692 Veterans (58% of enrolled Veterans) in VISN 4 have received a toxic exposure screening. Any Veterans who needed follow-up screenings were promptly referred to the appropriate staff who could ensure all needs were met.

We also continued to make significant progress toward achieving our goal of hiring staff faster and more competitively. Pay authorities granted in the PACT Act have allowed us to recruit and retain top talent at all levels within our medical centers. In FY23, our workforce grew by 6.1% with a net increase of 1,015 full-time employees, and our total loss rate was 8.2% which is the lowest in more than 7 years. We are extremely proud to have 3,776 Veterans employed across VISN 4 serving you and providing care and services for all Veterans.

As you will read in this issue, we filled key leadership positions in Coatesville, Lebanon, and Wilmington. We also recognized several outstanding team members who not only demonstrated ICARE values, but who went the extra mile to live by our ICARE ideals.

On behalf of VISN 4 employees, I thank all Veterans and their families for entrusting us to provide your health care.

Please stay safe and make sure you get your annual flu shot and COVID vaccine when recommended.

Sincerely,

Timothy W. Liezert
Network Director



VA Healthcare-VISN 4 Leadership Team

Timothy W. Liezert
Network Director

Charles R. Thilges
Deputy Network Director

Timothy Burke, M.D.
Chief Medical Officer

Denise Boehm, MSN, RN, NEA-BC
Chief Nursing Officer

Kelly O'Connell
Quality Management Officer

Teresa Waksmonski-Frye
Interim Chief Financial Officer

Amber Mesoras
Chief Human Resources Officer

David E. Cowgill
Communications Manager

Kristy Kralik
Executive Assistant



Did you know?

Getting a flu shot protects you, your family and your community. And if needed, you can safely get vaccinated for COVID at the same time you get a flu shot – one visit, two vaccines.

Eligible Veterans can get a no-cost flu shot from a nearby VA or at one of 65,000 community locations nationwide. To learn more, visit <https://www.prevention.va.gov/flu/>.



New medical center directors appointed

Jeffrey A. Beiler, II
Medical Center Director
Lebanon VA Medical Center



Jeffrey A. Beiler, II was appointed as director of Lebanon VA Medical Center on July 16, 2023.

Prior to this appointment, Mr. Beiler was detailed as the interim director of the Wilmington VA Medical Center in Delaware since Jan. 31, 2023. Before accepting that assignment, he served as the director of the Coatesville VA Medical Center since 2020.

Mr. Beiler has significant and progressive experience within VA. He was the associate director at VA medical centers in Clarksburg from 2009-2011 and in Philadelphia from 2011-2015. He also served as the chief financial officer in VHA's Chief Business Office for Purchased Care where he was responsible for a \$19 billion annual operating budget.

From 2016-2017, Mr. Beiler was the chief financial officer for Horsham Clinic - Universal Health Services, Inc., a 206-bed acute inpatient behavioral health care facility. He returned to VA and served as the associate director of the Lebanon VA Medical Center from 2017-2020, overseeing engineering, health administration, resource management, contracting, environmental management, human resources, logistics, procurement, privacy, group practice management, safety and occupational health.

Jennifer Harkins MS, FACHE
Executive Medical Center Director
Coatesville VA Medical Center



Jennifer Harkins was appointed as director of Coatesville VA Medical Center on August 28, 2023.

Ms. Harkins began her VA career in 1993 as the women Veteran coordinator at the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center in

Philadelphia. Since that time, she has served in increasingly more complex leadership roles in Philadelphia. She was appointed as the interim associate director at the Wilmington VA Medical Center in 2014, and most recently, Ms. Harkins has served as the associate director of the Coatesville VA Medical Center. She was responsible for finance and operations since 2017, and during that time she served as the acting director for nine months in 2020.

Ms. Harkins is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives, graduate of VA's Healthcare Leadership Development Program, has earned an Executive Leadership Certificate in Lean for Healthcare from the University of Tennessee Graduate School of Business, and holds a master's degree in Organizational and Strategic Leadership.

Vamsee Potluri
Executive Medical Center Director
Wilmington VA Medical Center



Vamsee Potluri was appointed as director of Wilmington VA Medical Center on September 24, 2023.

Mr. Potluri has served as the associate director of the Richard L. Roudebush VA Medical Center in Indianapolis, Indiana since Nov. 22, 2020.

A native of Houston, Texas, Mr. Potluri earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry and Biophysics in 2011 and dual master's degrees in Health Care Administration and Business Administration in 2013, all from the University of Houston. In 2018, he was recognized with the American College of Health Care Executive's Early Careerist Healthcare Executive Regent Award.

Mr. Potluri serves as a VA national subject matter expert on clinic practice management and he chairs numerous national committees and workgroups. He has developed a number of business intelligence tools which are nationally recognized for improving efficiency and access to care.



I CARE represents the core values that define the basic elements of how we go about our work—“who we are”—and form the underlying principles we use every day in our service to Veterans.

VISN 4 established a new, quarterly I CARE award to recognize employees who not only demonstrate our I CARE values, but who go the extra mile to live by our I CARE ideals. There are many wonderful examples of employees demonstrating these values in their day-to-day work.

Integrity • Commitment • Advocacy • Respect • Excellence

FY23 2nd Quarter Awardee

Andrew Gryskewicz
Voluntary Services Specialist
Butler VA Health Care System

Voluntary Services receives non-stop calls daily, requesting things for Veterans in need. Andrew Gryskewicz is always ready with an answer, his happiness in helping people always shows through with a smile. Early this year, Andrew received a call stating that a Veteran was waiting to be seen but had an “accident.” Andrew didn’t hesitate. He collected a little information necessary to bring the appropriate items, collected

those items, and was on his way – unsure of what exactly he was walking into.

Upon arrival, Andrew had found the Veteran’s “accident” was still very apparent; he knew how embarrassing this must be for the Veteran, so he moved right into action. Andrew secured a space to take the Veteran to help him clean up, and subsequently he helped the Veteran don new clothing. This, in itself, was embarrassing to the Veteran, but it was a much better situation in private than where he had previously been sitting. Once Andrew had finished helping the Veteran, he returned him to the waiting room. Here the Veteran was able to wait with dignity and respect.

Andrew had returned to his duties, but never told anyone what had just transpired. A little later he had mentioned that he had helped a Veteran, but didn’t elaborate on the extent of the help.

Andrew’s hard work and modesty in this situation is not only outstanding, but it is a regular occurrence. Many times, we hear people say “that’s not my job,” however, Andrew sees every Veteran as his job and reacts accordingly. Andrew is always mindful in showing all Veterans the VA’s ICARE values, to provide all Veterans with Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect (Dignity), and Excellence every single day.



Maura Marchese
HCHV Social Work Supervisor
Coatesville VA Medical Center

Maura Marchese has worked at the Coatesville VA Medical Center since September 2019. She started as a grant and per diem (GPD) liaison and was promoted to social work supervisor for Homeless Services in July 2022. One of Maura's most pressing tasks when she took on the supervisor role was the impending closure of 185 beds of grant and per diem transitional housing for homeless Veterans. Her goal was to ensure that all current residents were discharged to appropriate permanent housing by the time the program ceased operations. She led the team that accomplished this and consistently demonstrated the highest level of I CARE values.

Throughout this process she worked closely with the GPD contractors, community agencies, VA homeless services staff, and Veterans. Her reputation for integrity and excellence were a foundation in her work with our community partners and Coatesville VA leadership. She demonstrated her commitment and advocacy for Veterans

by tackling systems barriers and working with individual Veterans. Many Veterans were upset and frightened about the closure of the programs. Maura showed all the Veterans she worked with profound respect that helped her engage them in problem solving towards permanent housing.

She developed innovative strategies such as a housing fair specifically for the GPD Veterans that included landlords, VA services, and community services to ensure that every Veteran received every service and benefit that they were eligible for. At the same time, Maura led efforts to put a new contract in place for the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Contracted Emergency Residential Service (CERS).

She performed far beyond the expectations for a social worker as a contracting officer representative (COR) and driver of the process. It is unusual to have a social worker as a COR and manage the creation of a new contract. Maura showed her commitment by earning certification as a COR II on her own initiative. She was then able to independently do the market research and due diligence, develop the initial draft of the statement of work (SOW), lead the team that spent months developing the final SOW, and work closely with contracting to shepherd the process through to the final contract.

During this, she had to manage complex lease and contract extensions to ensure that top-notch transitional housing services continued to be provided by the existing CERS program until the new contract was awarded. Her advocacy for homeless Veterans in this matter was critical throughout the contracting process. Her excellence and commitment were noted by one of the contracting officers who was highly complementary, stating that she knew the process and had the skills to rival any contracting officer. Maura also demonstrated integrity throughout this process as demonstrated by her commitment to the confidential nature of all proceedings related to contract development and implementation.



► Certified Prosthetist/Orthotist Amanda Gilarski adjusts the prosthesis for U.S. Army Veteran Jeff Kinnan.



Central Fabrication Prosthetics Lab Spotlight

We highlight U. S. Army Veteran Jeff Kinnan who has a below the knee amputation and transitioned his prosthetic care to VA. Jeff explains how our new VISN 4 prosthetics lab provides the highest level of orthotic and prosthetics needs for our Veterans.

Q: Why did you decide to change your care to the VA for your prosthetic needs?

A: "I couldn't get my current style of prosthesis fixed and it was taking long to get it fixed."

Q: How has your experience been with the prosthetics lab at the Pittsburgh VA?

A: "Good, I like it. It's been night and day with the function and comfort of the prosthesis."

Q: Would you recommend prosthetics services to another Veteran?

A: "Instantly! I've been to a bunch of prosthetic stores and VA providers can care for me faster and they are well educated."

Q: How was your experience at VA different than the care received from your community providers?

A: "So much better care at the VA. I never have any problems at any VAs in all my years."

Fun story:

Jeff found a support system at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center where he and other amputee Veterans would go to the bar together and drink beer out of their prosthetic sockets.



For more information about our prosthetics lab, call 412-822-2286 or email amanda.gilarski@va.gov.



Quick Facts

Location and space

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

H.J. Heinz campus:

Lab in building #49.

Patient care area located in the rehabilitation center of building #71.

Date Opened

March 28, 2022

Staff

1 supervisory prosthetist/orthotist,

2 staff prosthetists/orthotists,

1 lab tech, 1 lead MSA, and

1 advanced MSA

Goal and mission

To provide exemplary orthotic and prosthetic services to our Veterans.

Why it is unique

We use cutting edge, state of the art technology to provide the latest in orthotic and prosthetic care to our Veterans in the most efficient and timely fashion.

Future Goals

Expand the reach of orthotic and prosthetic clinical services as well as fabrication services to provide orthotic and prosthetic care to more Veterans by utilizing advance technology and a mobile lab.

Current special projects that have VISN-wide impact

Expanding our prosthetic fabrication services throughout VISN 4.



Get the VA Benefits You Earned and Deserve

You may be eligible for VA health care benefits if you served in the active military, naval or air service. We encourage you to enroll after discharge because some Veterans may qualify for free eye and hearing care for life once they are enrolled in VA health care.

If you qualify for VA health care, you'll also receive coverage for the services you need to help you get—and stay—healthy. Each Veteran's medical benefits package is unique.

All Veterans receive coverage for most care and services, but only some will qualify for added benefits like dental care. The full list of your covered benefits depends on: your priority group (assigned after enrollment), the advice of your VA primary care provider (main doctor, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant) and the medical standards for treating any health conditions you may have.

Even if you don't need VA care right now, you may need it in the future—and once you're enrolled, you have access for life. VA is the best, most affordable health care in America for Veterans.

We want to bring as many Vets as possible into our care—not because that's what's best for us, but because that's what's best for them. And right now, thanks to the PACT Act, many more Veterans can enroll directly in VA care regardless of whether they're sick. This could mean life-changing care for Veterans, and we don't want anyone to miss out.

Our mission...

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.

Honoring the PACT Act

The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022 is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances.

Toxic Exposure Screenings

Every enrolled Veteran will receive an initial toxic exposure screening and a follow-up screening at least every five years. Veterans who are not enrolled, but who are eligible to enroll, will have an opportunity to enroll and receive the screening.

During your screening, you will be asked questions about potential exposure to an open burn pit or other hazards commonly associated with military environmental exposure. If you answer yes, you may be connected to support and resources, including a review by your primary care team or provider. This will help VA identify other potential risks for Veterans and inform future policy decisions.

Most recent data from December 5, 2023, shows 4,897,512 Veterans nationwide have received their toxic exposure screenings.

Contact Us

For more information about PACT Act and toxic exposure screenings contact an enrollment specialist at a medical center near you. You can also make an appointment to apply in-person. Please bring a copy of your DD-214 and a valid form of identification with you.

For your convenience, VISN 4 has eight medical centers in Pennsylvania including: Altoona, Butler, Coatesville, Erie, Lebanon, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Wilkes Barre and another in Wilmington, Delaware. We also provide a network of VA outpatient clinics throughout Pennsylvania, in parts of Ohio, Virginia, southern Delaware and southern New Jersey.

For more information, visit <https://www.va.gov/pact> or call 1-800-698-2411.

New Community Outreach Managers

VISN 4 has hired two public affairs outreach program managers to support community outreach across all medical centers and outpatient clinics. These positions are responsible for developing outreach plans, promoting comprehensive outreach programs, tracking event results, etc. in partnership with internal and external stakeholders.

- Jacqueline Hinker will be covering the Eastern Market including Coatesville, Lebanon, Philadelphia, Wilkes-Barre and Wilmington
- Kimberly Kalista will be covering the Western Market including Altoona, Butler, Erie and Pittsburgh

These outreach program managers will play a key role in supporting our Veterans' enrollment process.



Jacqueline Hinker
Outreach Program Manager
Eastern Market



Kimberly Kalista
Outreach Program Manager
Western Market

On-demand care that saves you time

With Tele Emergency Care, you can receive prompt care for many acute medical issues without the need for a visit to an emergency department.

Using phone or secure video, our team of triage nurses and licensed medical providers can diagnose a variety of common illnesses and begin treatment the same day. There is **no appointment necessary** and **no copayment for your visit**.

Veterans receiving health care at VA medical centers throughout VISN 4 can call your main VA medical center and select Option 3 (speak to a nurse) from the menu or dial **1-833-Tele Urgent (1-833-835-3874)**.

Tele Emergency Care is available from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., 365 days/year.

Tele Emergency Care supports but does not replace in-person care. If you believe that your condition is life threatening, call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest emergency department.

If Tele Emergency Care isn't the best option for your condition, our experienced emergency medicine providers can help recommend the most appropriate plan.

To learn more about Tele Emergency Care, visit <https://www.visn4.va.gov/tele-urgent>.



1-833-Tele Urgent
(1-833-835-3874)

Common conditions we can evaluate include:

- Cough, cold, flu and COVID symptoms
- Sore throat
- COPD and asthma flares
- Eye redness & irritation
- Tick and other insect bites
- Rashes
- Skin infections
- Minor allergic reactions
- GI illness
- Urinary tract infections
- Gout flares
- Muscle sprains/strains

Not sure what kind of care you need? A quick call to our triage nurses can help!



VA

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of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health
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VISN 4

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We'd Like to Hear from You

Vision for Excellence is published for the employees, volunteers, patients and friends of VA Healthcare-VISN 4. For more information about this publication, contact David Cowgill at david.cowgill@va.gov.

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