

New England **VETERAN**

A publication of the VA New England Healthcare System

WELLNESS
Adaptive fun

CAREGIVING
Nursing excellence

COMMUNITY
New library

ENGAGEMENT
Suicide prevention

New England **Veteran**



ALL IN FOR VETERANS

HARD AT WORK

Undersecretary shares vision

AWARD-WINNING CARE

VA Manchester personnel recognized

WINTER FUN

Adaptive sports keep Veterans moving

Spring 2023



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA New England Healthcare System

New England Veteran

VA New England Network Director
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On the Cover: VISN 1 and Bedford leadership teams pose with VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal during his visit to Bedford March 8, 2013. Front row, left to right: Dr. Kamal Patel, Kathryn McGinn RN, Kendra Lee, JD, MBA and Dr. Shereef Elnahal. Back row, left to right: Yettalevete Enoakhare, Dr. James Meisel, Ryan Lilly, VISN 1 Network Director and VA Bedford Director Joan Clifford.

Website

www.newengland.va.gov/news

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Message from the Network Director

Dear Veterans,

It's finally spring; always a nice welcome after our long New England winters. This spring finds us ultra-productive at VA New England Healthcare Network.

You may recall in the last issue of *New England Veteran*, we highlighted the PACT Act. The PACT Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. In this issue, we highlight the new Veterans Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment Act of 2020 (COMPACT Act).

With the COMPACT Act, VA will now provide, pay for, or reimburse the cost of eligible Veterans' emergent suicide care and treatment at a VA, or non-VA facility — including ambulance transportation costs, inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days, and outpatient care for no more than 90 days, including social work.

We had a great visit from Undersecretary for Health (USH) Dr. Shereef Elnahal back in March at our VA Bedford Medical Center. Please be sure to read all about his visit and his six VHA strategic priorities.

Also in this issue, we spotlight the return of the winter adaptive sports clinic. This was the first in-person winter sports clinic we've had since the start of the pandemic. It was great to see our Veterans back on the slopes!

Our VA employees go to great lengths to offer the best service to Veterans. Read the cover story about how VHA Manchester employees go the extra mile to keep our boiler plants up and running. In another story, we celebrate two VHA Manchester employees who are awardees for this year's Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing. A big hearty congratulations to Licensed Practical Nurse Krystle M. O'Shaughnessy and Medical Center Director Kevin M. Forrest on their selections!

I hope you all enjoy our spring weather and I look forward to connecting with you in the months to come.

With thanks for your service,

Ryan Lilly, MPA
Network Director

Annual New England Adaptive Winter Sports Clinic returns

Story by Russ Tippets,
Senior Editor & Writer,
Coast Guard Veteran

Photos by Winfield S.
Danielson, Public Affairs
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Healthcare System

VA Boston Healthcare System and White River Junction VA Healthcare System co-hosted the New England Winter Sports Clinic, January 9-13, 2023. Over the years, it has grown into the nation's second largest adaptive winter sports clinic offered to Veterans. This was the first time the winter clinic was back in action since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

This event attracts Veterans with disabilities from all over the USA, with a large contingent hailing from the New England states. Together with VA White River Junction and VA Boston, New England Healing Sports Association (NEHSA) fields 120 volunteers to provide adaptive skiing and snowboarding lessons at no cost to the Veterans.



Navy Veteran Roland Filion, of Manville, R.I., makes a run in a sit-ski, with fellow Navy Veteran and New England Healing Sports Association volunteer Ray Luscinski at Mt. Sunapee, N.H.

The clinic's kickoff event occurred at the James W. Champion III ice rink in West Lebanon, N.H., where Veterans from across New England participated in adaptive sled hockey.

The rest of the week was spent with NEHSA at Mount Sunapee in Newbury, N.H., where Veterans and caregivers learned adaptive skiing and snowboarding. At the CCBA Witherrell Recreation Center in Lebanon, N.H., pickleball, rhythmic drumming and kayaking were offered as alternate adaptive sports activities.



Army Veteran Wayde Rozniewski at Mt. Sunapee, N.H., Jan. 11, 2023, during the VA New England Winter Adaptive Sports Clinic.

The NEHSA partners yearly with VA to hold the clinic. NEHSA was founded in 1972 by a group of Vietnam Veterans who had sustained significant combat injuries. Over the last 51 years, the program has grown into a year-round outdoor sport and recreation nonprofit organization serving both Veterans and civilians with physical and cognitive disabilities from around New England.

Veterans enrolled in VA health care interested in getting involved in adaptive sports programs can get a referral from their primary care physician.

Round the clock

Boiler plant team on all-season “hot standby”

Story and photos by Lori Flynn, Public Affairs Officer, VA Manchester

A small tactical team operates the boiler plant 24/7, 365 days a year, serving our Veteran patients at the Manchester VA Medical Center (VAMC).

When you enter the boiler plant, the humming of mechanical equipment is a surprisingly soothing sound. The heat that envelopes the air as you enter the facility is greatly contrasted by the frigid outdoor temperatures of New Hampshire during the winter months. The team of boiler plant operators accept the challenges that Mother Nature and Murphy’s Law send their way and continue to strive to keep patients warm and hot water readily available throughout the facility.

“Our boiler plant operators are seasoned with experience,” said Eugene Moser, boiler plant supervisor. “Many of them performed these duties while serving in the military and brought their expertise here. Their talent encompasses high-pressure boilers and plant equipment, including boiler water and chemistry, as well as auxiliary equipment.”



The Manchester VA Medical Center boiler plant enables heat, hot water, and equipment sterilization for patients and staff utilizing the facility.

Navy Veteran David Petersen, one of five boiler plant operators at the medical facility, maintains and troubleshoots the complex boiler system during his 12-hour shift. “One of the really good things about working here, and this agency as a whole, is that safety is top priority,” said Petersen, who has served on the team for the past 10 years.

The main level of the boiler plant consists of three steam-operated boilers. The second level of the plant houses the deaerator and condensate tanks, which are the first two processes in preparing treated water for the boilers. The intricate and detail-oriented process for continuing operations in the plant goes well beyond the stereotypical “open and shut” valves we see in the movies.

“Time after time, their analytical, math, and technical skills have kept the plant operating safely and hazard-free,” said Moser.

The boiler systems were modernized in December 2019, featuring enhanced electrical monitoring and performance, enabling a 40-year lifespan for the upgraded boiler system. The plan included redundancy heating in case a boiler encountered a disruption in service.

Boiler Plant Operator and Army Veteran Dennis Aldrich said, “We keep our boilers on ‘hot standby’ 24/7, 365 days a year and whenever we have a power outage or if something goes wrong, we have another boiler that serves as backup.”

Hot standby is when the team uses one boiler as the main heating source but has another boiler pre-heated and ready to move from 67 pounds per square inch (PSI) to 85 PSI within minutes to keep the facility operating. Through a small glass window located at the back of the boiler, the flames of fire heating the steam is an impressive sight.

“We are the nucleus of the hospital; we keep everything running,” noted Aldrich. “We heat the Veterans up and cool them down. We supply hot water for the hospital and sterilization, and a lot of people don’t know that.”



Boiler Plant Operator Dennis Aldrich removes the boiler from “hot standby” during a heating redundancy check at Manchester VA Medical Center.

The critical process of medical equipment sterilization is paramount to operations at the medical facilities. The boiler plant operators take pride in safeguarding Veteran patients and staff as part of their mission.

“I like our mission here, it means something to me,” shared Petersen. “I am not interacting with Veterans on a day-to-day basis. But I like to know that what I do here does have an impact even though it isn’t something you normally think about.”

“All of my operators communicate well no matter what the situation is,” said Moser. “This is crucial to plant operations in keeping the plant safe for all operators and personnel at this facility.” Moser is honored to work alongside the boiler plant operators and appreciates their commitment to customer service, dedication to the mission, and teamwork across their footprint within the Manchester VAMC.

“I like how friendly everybody is and how we work as a team. It is the best job that I have ever had, and I like serving the Veterans and that is the reason why I like being here,” said Aldrich.

Undersecretary for Health unveils priorities during visit

By Ryan Lilly, VA New England Network Director

Photos by Russ Tippets, Senior Editor & Writer, Coast Guard Veteran

We were thrilled to have Undersecretary for Health (USH) Dr. Shereef Elnahal visit us at VA Bedford Medical Center on March 8, 2023. During his visit, Dr. Elnahal helped present awards to VA Bedford employees, met with senior leadership, held a town hall meeting, and toured the Bedford facilities.

As the USH, Dr. Elnahal directs a health care system with an annual budget of approximately \$102.2 billion, overseeing the delivery of care to more than 9 million enrolled Veterans. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the largest integrated health care system in the United States, providing care at over 1,300 healthcare facilities, including 171 VA Medical Centers and 1,120 VHA outpatient clinics.

During his town hall meeting at Bedford, Dr. Elnahal helped present seven awards to VA employees. Dr. Elnahal said, “the exemplary and superlative work done here is the standard for recognition, which to me means that everybody on this call and everybody in this room lives to make Veteran lives better.”



Undersecretary for Health (USH) Dr. Shereef Elnahal (left), VA New England Network Director Ryan Lilly (center) and VA Bedford Medical Center Director Joan Clifford tour the Bedford facilities during a visit from Dr. Elnahal on March 8, 2023.



Undersecretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal (right) speaks with 62D Nurse Manager and Veteran Milika Njenga during his facility tour at Bedford VAMC on March 8, 2023.



Undersecretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal (far right) and Bedford VAMC Director Joan Clifford (far left) present an award to the Engineering & Environmental Management Services team at VA Bedford, March 8, 2023.

Dr. Elnahal also outlined six key strategic priorities during his visit. These six priorities are the top-level strategic and operational advancements of the greatest importance that must be achieved by VHA. They are intended to be clear and actionable achievements that deserve our top performance, our focused commitment, and the best use of all of our resources.

The six priorities are:

- Hire faster and more competitively
- Connect Veterans to the soonest and best care
- Serve Veterans with military environmental exposures
- Accelerate VA's journey to a High Reliability Organization
- Support Veterans' whole health, their caregivers and survivors
- Prevent Veteran suicide

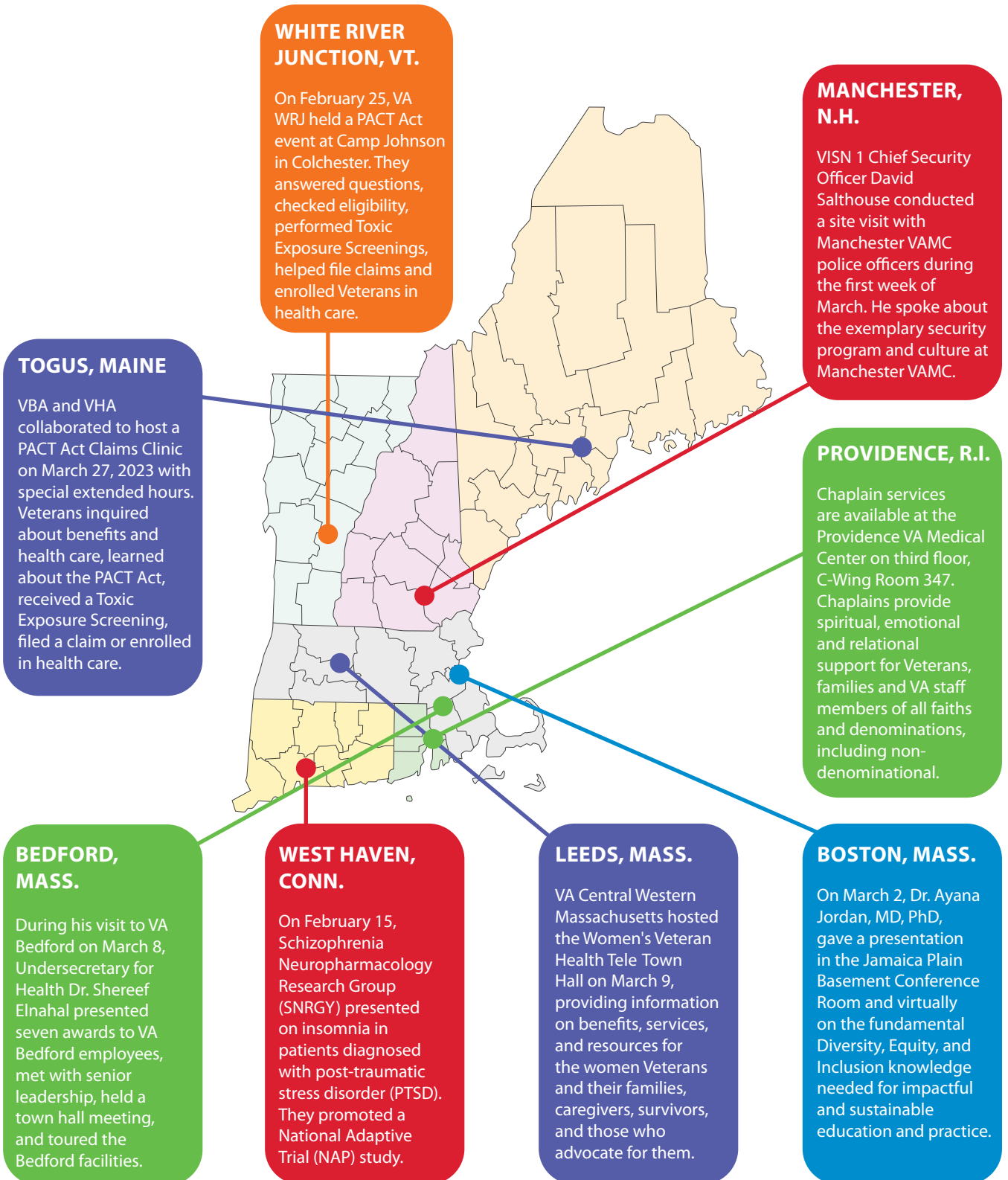
Here in the VA New England Healthcare Network, we have already made great strides to ensure these top priorities are our top priorities as well.

During Dr. Elnahal's town hall meeting, he also spoke about the newly passed PACT Act. He spoke about the need to increase hiring to provide the proper care for all the Veterans, who will now be eligible for VA health care due to the PACT Act. He shared a story about a 74-year-old Vietnam Veteran who just received VA care for the very first time. Elnahal said, "Don't discount that Veterans who may not have ever gotten VA care won't take us up on care now because of the PACT Act."

Nationally, VHA needs to hire approximately 52,000 employees per year over the next five years to keep pace with the increasing demand for care. The VA New England Healthcare Network has been holding job fairs and employment events since late last year and will continue to do so through 2023. You can visit USAJOBS to see all of our current openings and visit the VA careers page to learn more about the application process.

It's always great to have our senior VHA leadership visit any of our facilities in the New England Healthcare Network. It allows us to showcase the wonderful work we perform day in and day out, providing our Veterans with the best health care possible.

To read about each of these headline stories, visit the VA New England "News" page at www.newengland.va.gov/news



Veterans Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment Act of 2020 (COMPACT)



Dear Veterans,

Starting in January 2023, VA will provide, pay for, or reimburse the cost of eligible Veterans' emergent suicide care and treatment at a VA, or non-VA facility — including ambulance transportation costs, inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days, and outpatient care for no more than 90 days, including social work.

This will reduce the number of Veteran suicides by offering immediate care when they are at their most vulnerable, and potentially increase access to acute suicide care to an additional 9 million unenrolled Veterans.

COMPACT-eligible individuals, regardless of VA enrollment status, are:

- Former members of the armed forces who were discharged or released from active duty after more than 24 months of active service under conditions other than dishonorable.
- Former members of the armed forces, including reserve service members, who served more than 100 days under a combat exclusion or in support of a contingency operation either directly or by operating an unmanned aerial vehicle from another location who were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.
- Former members of the armed forces who were the victims of a physical assault of a sexual nature, a battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment while serving in the armed forces.

This is a tremendous opportunity for us to save lives. Talk to your friends and family about COMPACT and what it means for Veterans. There are Veterans who need impactful conversations with trusted sources. Saving a Veteran from suicide can start with you.

For more information, visit [Emergency Medical Care - Community Care \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/emergency-medical-care-community-care). Thank you for all you do.

Sincerely,
Ryan Lilly, MPA
Network Director, VA New England Health Care System

Boston's West Roxbury campus cuts ribbon on new library



Left to right: Voluntary Service specialists Peter Tribuna and Eben Orcutt, Vincent Ng, director of the VA Boston Healthcare System, Dr. Bonnie Charland, associate director for Quality Management, Lisa Alcalá, patient experience officer, Matthew Edwards, chief of the Center for Development and Civic Engagement, Dr. Michael Charness, chief medical officer, and Michael Payne, deputy executive director, during the ribbon-cutting of a new library at the West Roxbury campus on February 8, 2023.

**Story and photo by Winfield S. Danielson,
Public Affairs Officer, VA Boston**

VA Boston Healthcare System (HCS) officially opened a new library for Veteran patients at its West Roxbury campus on February 8, 2023. Vincent Ng, director of VA Boston HCS, and Matthew Edwards, chief of VA Boston's Center for Development and Civic Engagement, cut the ribbon on the new library.

Centrally located on the first floor of Building 1, the library provides easy access for both inpatient and outpatient Veterans who can browse and borrow books and magazines. There's no return policy, so no late fees.

The project came about following feedback from inpatient Veterans, who wanted more options for engagement and entertainment during their stays.

"I want to thank Matt Edwards and the Center for Development and Civic Engagement staff for their commitment to this project, and of course our community partners, who donated the funds and materials to help make our Veterans' and families' inpatient stays here at West Roxbury a little more pleasant," Ng said.

VA Manchester personnel receive awards for Excellence in Nursing

By Lori Flynn, Public Affairs Officer, VA Manchester

Licensed Practical Nurse Krystle M. O'Shaughnessy and Medical Center Director Kevin M. Forrest of the Manchester VA Medical Center (VAMC) have been named awardees for this year's Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing from The Department of Veterans Affairs.

"The annual Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing is an honor bestowed upon the best of the best across our nation's VA health care professionals," said Network Director Ryan Lilly, VA New England Health Care System. "I offer my sincerest congratulations to Krystle and Kevin for the world-class health care they provide to Veterans at the Manchester VA Medical Center."

The annual VA Secretary's Awards in Nursing Excellence program began in 1984, and today, 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, etc., a 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.



Medical Center Director Kevin M. Forrest

The peer-driven nomination process begins at the medical center, moving nominees forward to the regional level, and ultimately onto VA Secretary Denis McDonough's desk. Manchester VAMC garnered two of the six program awards.

Forrest's knowledge and skills needed to keep the Manchester VAMC community engaged through the COVID-19 pandemic captured leadership's attention. He excels at relationship-building and effectively collaborates with nursing to find new ways to create healthy, healing, and regenerative work environments.



Licensed Practical Nurse Krystle M. O'Shaughnessy

As a frontline healthcare professional, O'Shaughnessy is the first contact with Veterans for the Home Telehealth program, providing education and assisting in the management of patient diseases. During a staffing shortage, she volunteered to manage the telehealth compliance, ensuring timely medical assistance to patients in the program, as well as COVID-19 positive patients needing closer monitoring through patient-driven care.

They will receive their awards at a ceremony on May 3.

New England Veteran

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New England **VETERAN**



VA Health Chat

Connect with Your VA Care Team Over Chat

Receive care from VA without stepping foot into a clinic or hospital. The VA Health Chat app provides easy, online access to chat with VA staff when you have minor health questions and more. Only patients receiving care at select locations are eligible to use VA Health Chat.



Use VA Health Chat for immediate answers when:



You feel ill and unsure about going to an emergency room or clinic



You have a reaction to a medication



You have questions about your prescriptions



You need medical advice for a minor injury or illness

VA Health Chat team can also help you:

- Find your closest VA facility
- Schedule an appointment
- Refill a VA prescription
- Send a non-urgent message to your health care team

Download VA Health Chat on the VA App Store, the Apple App Store, or the Google Play Store. The app is also available through the VA Launchpad app.

VA team members are available to chat Monday through Friday from **7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.** local time, excluding federal holidays.