

# Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Veterans Health Administration



# Tribal Health

**Presentation for:** CMS/NIHB: I/T/U Training

**Presented by:** Marcia Harris, MPH, M.S. Ed, Program Analyst-Strategic Planner, VHA Office of Tribal Health

**Date:** August 5, 2025



Choose **VA**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Overview

## Topics

About the VHA Office of Tribal Health

Why Should Native Veterans Sign Up for VA Health Care?

Benefits of Signing Up for VA Health Care

Whole Health, National VA Chaplain Services, and Incorporation of Traditional Healing

American Indian / Alaska Native Veteran Copayment Exemption

Rural Native Veteran Health Care Navigator Program

Clinic-in-a-Clinic

Mobile Medical Unit (MMU) Program

VHA-IHS Memorandum of Understanding

Agreements

VA Resources for Homeless and At-Risk Veterans/HUD-VASH

Suicide Prevention

Office of Tribal Health Outreach

Resources



Choose VA

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# About the VHA Office of Tribal Health (OTH)

## Mission

Honoring VHA's commitments to provide timely and quality health care and access for American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans.

## Vision

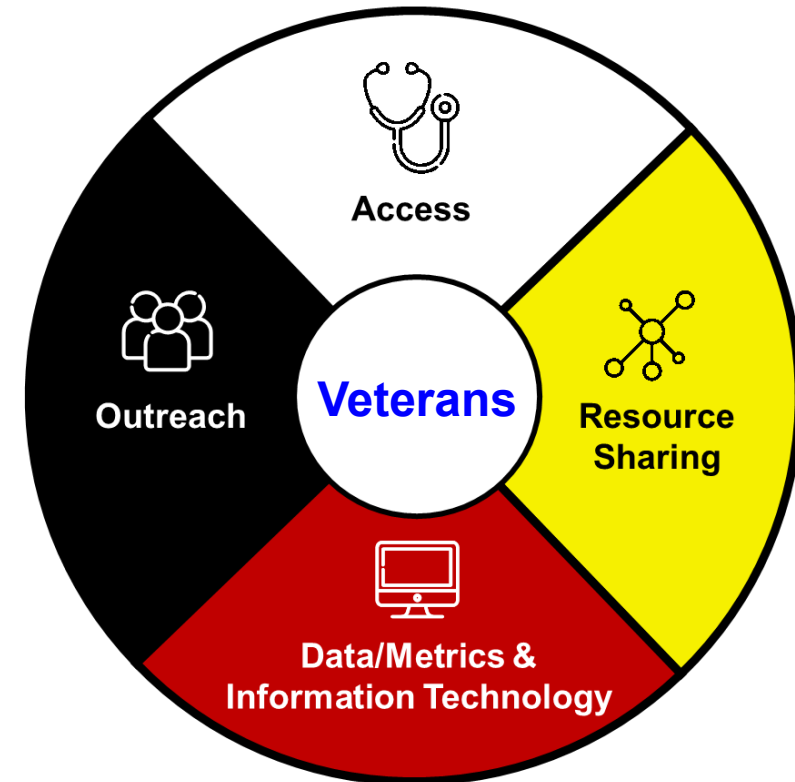
Connecting and expanding health care access for Native Veterans through expert guidance at the national, regional, and local levels.

## Scope

Expanding partnerships among VAVHA, the White House, Federal and State Agencies, Tribal Health Programs, Urban Indian Organizations, and Veteran Service Organizations in accordance with statutory requirements.

- Created December 27, 2021
- VHA Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health
- Provides VAVHA national-level leadership, guidance, strategic direction, and metrics for Native Veteran health care access and related policy
- Leads VHA's management and administration of the VHA-Indian Health Service (IHS) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in accordance with statutory requirements
- Direct partnership with the VA Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs (TAC) and its Health Subcommittee, in accordance with statutory requirements

VHA Office of Tribal Health's strategic and operational plans align and support the priorities below.



Choose VA

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Why Should Native Veterans Sign Up for VA Health Care?

- Largest integrated healthcare system in the United States.
- In addition to Primary Care, VHA provides extensive specialty care, including but not limited to:
  - Mental Health specializing in PTSD, Military Sexual Trauma, Substance Use Disorder
  - Prosthetics
  - Geriatrics
  - Telemedicine
  - Women's Health
  - Whole Health
  - Rural Health
  - Cardiology
  - Dermatology
  - Ophthalmology & Optometry
  - Surgery
  - Blind Rehabilitation Service
  - Homeless Services
  - Suicide Prevention



Choose **VA**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Benefits of Signing Up for VA Health Care

- **Veterans Health Administration:**
  - No copayment for enrolled Native Veterans for health or specialty care.
  - Indian Health Service/Tribal Health Programs/Urban Indian Organizations (I/T/U) receive payment for providing health care to Native Veterans.
  - Native Veterans may receive care at I/T/Us and VA at the same time; they do not need to choose one or the other.
  - Beneficiary Travel: File for travel pay reimbursement.
- **Veterans Benefits Administration:**
  - Potential monthly income for disability.
    - PACT Act/Toxic Exposure
  - Native American Direct Loan (NADL) Program
    - Potential low-rate home loans/mortgages (2.5% as of March 2025).
- **National Cemetery Administration:**
  - Potential burial expenses paid.



Choose **VA**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Four Ways to Sign Up for VA Health Care

## 1. Mail:

- Fill out an application for Health Benefits (VA Form 10-10EZ) and mail with DD-214 to:  
Health Eligibility Center  
PO Box 5207  
Janesville, WI 53547-5207

## 2. Phone:

- 877-222-8387 (They might be able to pull up your DD-214)

## 3. In Person:

- Take your DD-214 and 10-10EZ to:  
Local VA Medical Center or Clinic; ask for Enrollment Office

## 4. Online:

- <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/>



# VHA Whole Health

- Whole Health is an approach to health care that empowers and enables Veterans to take charge of their health and well-being and live their lives to the fullest.
- Focus is around **what matters to the Veteran**, not what is the matter with the Veteran.
- The health care team gets to know the Veteran as a person, before working to develop a personalized health care plan based on values, needs, and goals of the Veteran.
- Whole Health personalized plan can include Traditional Healing/Healer.

<https://www.va.gov/wholehealth/>

<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/whole-health-facility-contacts.asp>



Choose **VA**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# National VA Chaplain Services

- National VA Chaplains provide complete religious ministry to Veteran patients in accordance with their needs and desires. They address religious, spiritual, moral, and ethical problems of patients, ministering to newly admitted, pre-and post-operative patients, the critically ill, and the families concerned.
- Required practicum for chaplain trainees varies by location, and may include:
  - Overview of current and historical Indigenous people related to a local Service Area.
  - Introduction to key people, including Tribal Elders and Traditional Healers.
  - Introduction to important ceremonies, practices, and historical and generational trauma.
- Current partnerships between Chaplains and other VHA partners are ongoing, including development of local and national Traditional Healing Policies.
- Chaplains are on call 24/7.

Contact: [Kristen.Melton@va.gov](mailto:Kristen.Melton@va.gov), 405-550-0054



Choose **VA**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Incorporation of Traditional Healing Practices

Examples of Traditional Healing Practices include the following: Sweat Lodges, Talking Circles, Smudging Ceremonies

- Albuquerque, NM – Raymond G. Murphy VAMC
- Black Hills Health Care System Hot Springs, SD
- Central Texas Veterans Health Care System
- Fort Harrison, MT
- Fort Meade, SD
- Grand Junction, CO – VAMC
- Phoenix, AZ – VAMC
- VA Puget Sound
- VA Roseburg
- Salt Lake City, UT – George E. Wahlen VAMC
- Sheridan, WY – VAMC
- VA Spokane
- Tucson, AZ
- Walla Walla, WA – VAMC
- VA White City



# American Indian/Alaska Native Veteran Copayment Exemption

Eligible American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans who are enrolled in VA and are seeking the copayment exemption will need to complete the following three easy steps:

1. Make a copy of only one of the following Official Tribal Documents, including, but not limited to:
  - a. Tribal Enrollment or Citizenship/Membership ID Card, or
  - b. Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood issued by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or
  - c. Documentation issued by a Tribe on official letterhead indicating individual affiliation.
2. Fill out VA Form 10-334 and make a copy. The form can be found at <https://www.va.gov/find-forms/about-form-10-334>.
3. Mail both documents to the address below:

VHA Tribal Documentation  
PO Box 5100  
Janesville, WI 53547-5100

## Copayment Exemption Update

- As of 5/12/25:
  - Total Applications Approved: 5,854
- As of 5/5/25:
  - Total Dollar Amount of Copayments Exempted and/or Reimbursed: \$5,379,842.40

***More than 98K Native Veterans are enrolled in VA. Let's encourage them to apply...together!***



Choose **VA**

**VA**



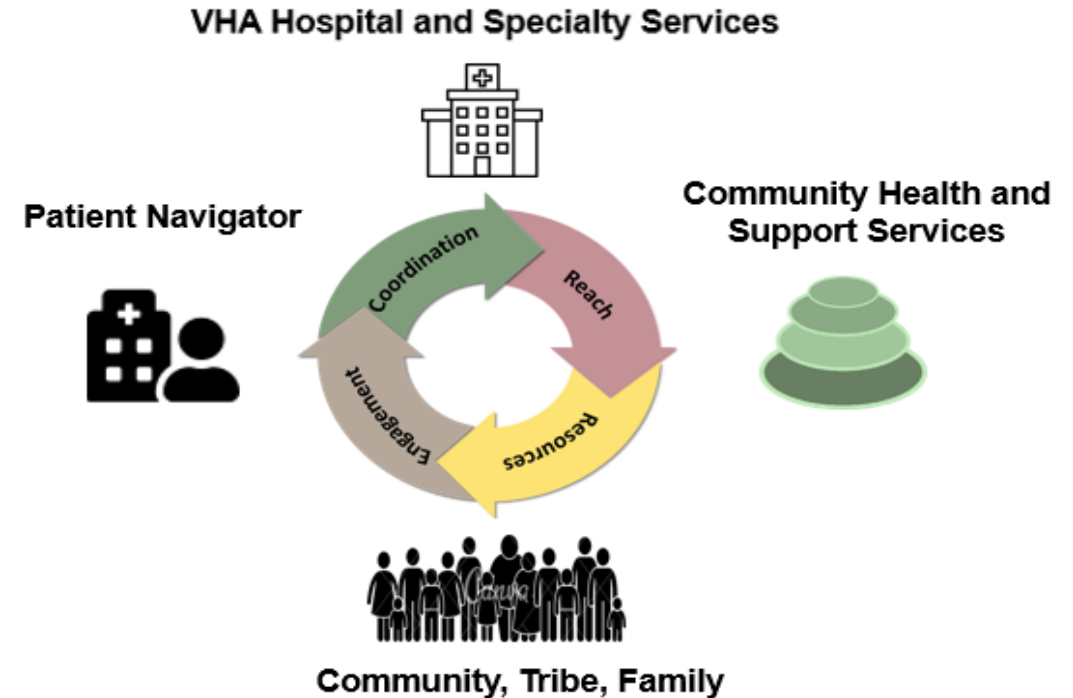
U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# About the Rural Native Veteran Health Care Navigator Program

*The overall project goal is to pilot, refine, and disseminate an innovative Rural Native Veteran (RNV) Health Care Navigator Program to increase RNV access to healthcare and Veteran-associated resources.*

## A Health Care Patient Navigator

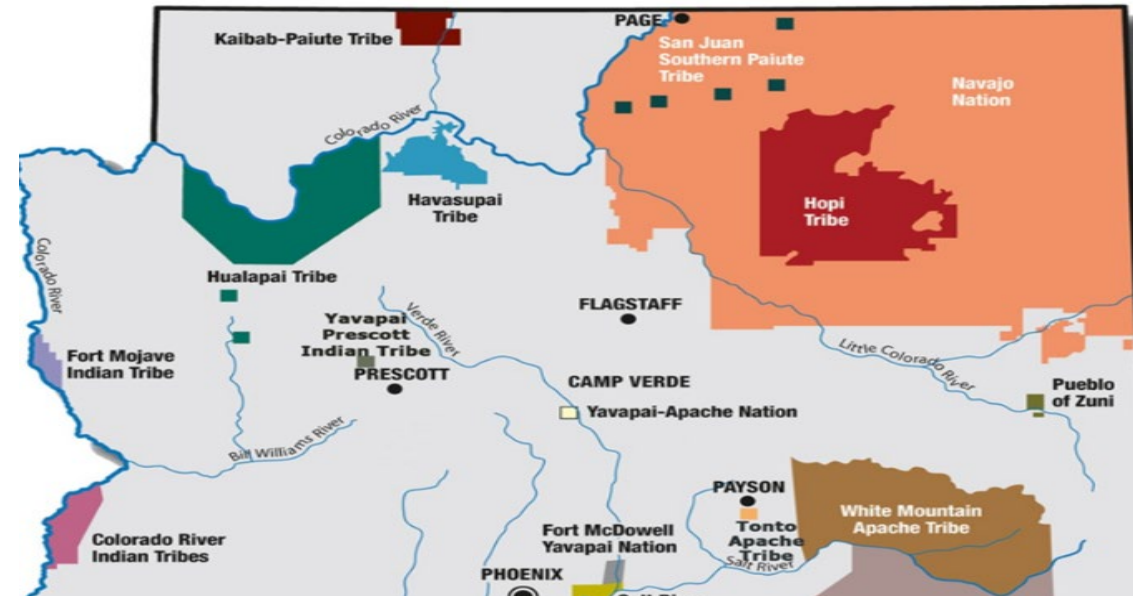
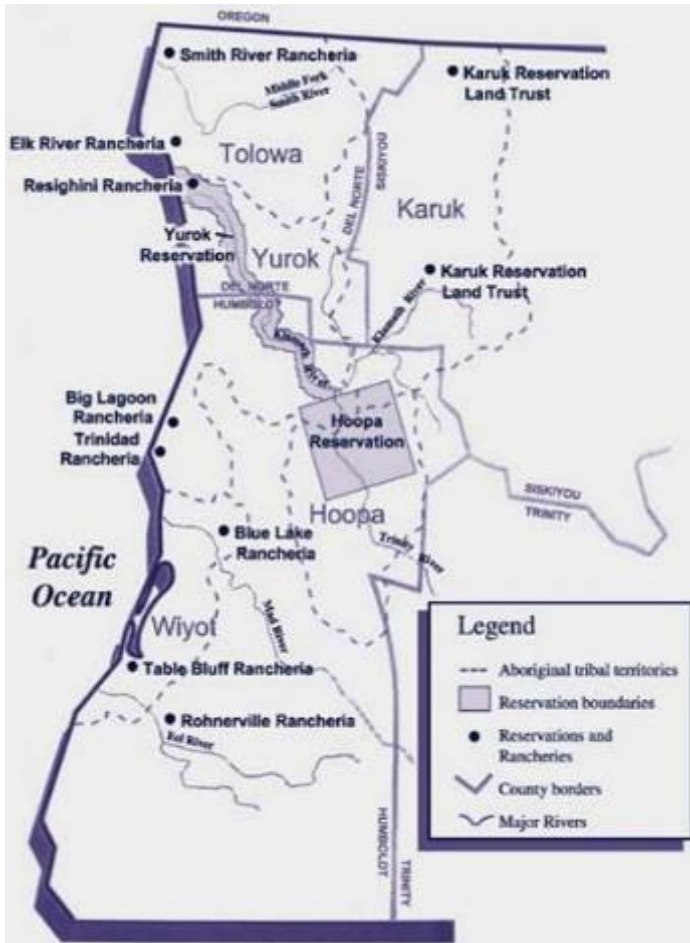
- ▶ Is a member of the health care team who helps Rural Native Veteran patients navigate the healthcare system and barriers that impede access to care. Such assistance may include:
  - ▶ Coordinating patient care that engages VA, VHA, IHS, federally recognized tribes, local communities, and other state and federal agencies to improve access to health care and benefits
  - ▶ Connecting patients with other resources
  - ▶ Helping patients understand the health care system



# RNV Navigator Program Status

## Program Status

- 2 active sites with Navigators in the field
  - **NAVAHCS**
  - **San Francisco VA Healthcare System: Eureka, CA CBOC**
- Developing proposal for wider dissemination



# Clinic-in-a-Clinic

## Clinic-in-a-Clinic

- VHA, IHS and Navajo Nation have joined together to provide VA Healthcare within IHS clinics:
  - Chinle, 2/2024
  - Kayenta, 3/2024
- Both sites have VHA providers and benefits staff from the Northern Arizona VA on location at the IHS clinics – meeting our Native Veterans where they live!
- This arrangement may be duplicated at any of the following:
  - IHS Clinics/Hospitals
  - Tribal Health Programs
  - Urban Indian Organizations



*How are these clinics established?*



*The local VHA and IHS Leadership sign an interagency agreement. THPs and UIOs sign up with the Community Care Network or sign a Veterans Care Agreement.*



# NAVAHCS Mobile Medical Unit Program

In May 2024, Northern Arizona VA Health Care System (NAVAHCS) and their partners began deploying Mobile Medical Units to 40 remote locations on Navajo, Hopi, Colorado River, and Ft. Mohave lands. Key highlights through March 2025 include:

- 103 New Enrollments
- 452 New Claims Filed
- 84 Medical Appointments Completed
- 132 ID Card Submissions



## Additional Highlights

- ✓ Suicidal Ideation identified, and immediate prevention efforts commenced including an emergency psychiatric evaluation, medication, and follow-up scheduling.
- ✓ One village is only accessible by a dirt road and is home to many Native Veterans who do not leave their village, but send relatives for shopping needs, etc.
- ✓ Purple Heart Veteran identified who was unaware that he was eligible for VHA health care.
- ✓ Multiple medical appointments were provided for Native Veterans who had not seen a medical professional in many years.
- ✓ Ten days after a kidney removal, a Veteran received triage and incision site evaluation and instructions and was escalated for community care follow-up.

# VHA-IHS Memorandum of Understanding

## VHA-IHS MOU Mutual Goals

**PATIENTS/VETERANS:** Increase enrollment and navigation for Native Veterans in VHA and IHS health care systems.

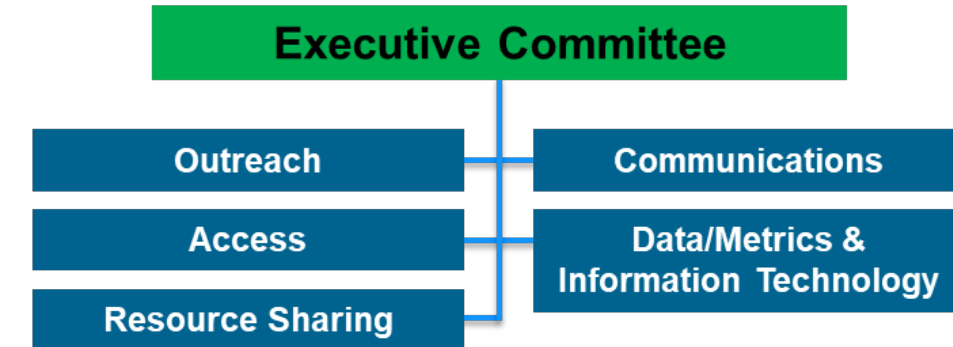
**ACCESS:** Leverage strengths of VHA and IHS at the national, regional and local levels to support the efficient delivery of timely and optimal clinical care.

**RESOURCE SHARING:** Improve access for Native Veterans through resource sharing.

**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY:** Integrate electronic health records and other systems that affect the health care of Native Veterans.

How We Implement

## VHA-IHS MOU Structure



# Agreements

- **Reimbursement Agreements:**
  - VHA reimburses IHS, THPs, and UIOs for direct care provided to Native Veterans.
- **Purchase of Ancillary Care (ordered by VHA provider):**
  - **Community Care Agreement or Veterans Care Agreement**
    - Agreement between VHA and a non-federal organization to allow for the purchase of ancillary care from THP/UIO facilities.
  - **Interagency Agreement (IAA)**
    - Agreement between two federal agencies to purchase care (ancillary services). E.g., VHA and IHS have signed IAAs for the VHA Clinic-in-a-Clinic Program to purchase care and/or share resources, such as equipment, telehealth, specialty care, etc.



# VA Resources for Homeless and At-Risk Veterans

- VA offers a wide array of services to address the full range of housing needs Veterans may have. We provide:
  - **Prevention services** that keep Veterans from becoming homeless.
  - **Outreach services** that are the front doors to both VA homeless programs and the broader VA health care system.
  - **Residential services** that provide temporary placement, in the form of emergency or transitional housing, for Veterans who need a place to stay right now.
  - **Permanent housing services** that connect Veterans to affordable housing in their communities. These services come with either short or long-term rental subsidies, case management, and varying levels of wrap-around supportive services to ensure that Veterans have all the necessary resources to stay housed.
- VA also assists Veterans in the **criminal justice system** with accessing VA services, helps Veterans gain **meaningful employment**, or takes care of their health needs through **primary care** tailored to the unique access barriers that Veterans experiencing homelessness face.



# Permanent Housing through HUD-VASH

- Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) provides homeless Veterans **rental subsidies** and **intensive case management** to support their housing stability.
- However, VA identified barriers (e.g., jurisdiction issues) to serving Native Veterans who wanted to live in their **Indian reservation communities where their natural support systems were located**.
- In response, VA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) developed Tribal HUD-VASH, which awards hybrid **Indian Housing Block Grants to tribes or tribally designated housing entities** to provide rental assistance for Veterans and their households who are experiencing homelessness and houselessness. It also expands eligibility to Native Veterans who are at risk of homelessness and houselessness.
- Currently, there are **29 Tribal HUD-VASH partnerships**.
- HUD is now accepting [applications to expand Tribal HUD-VASH](#) to new and existing grantees.

For more information, email [HomelessVets@va.gov](mailto:HomelessVets@va.gov) or visit [www.va.gov/homeless](http://www.va.gov/homeless).



Choose **VA**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Suicide Prevention

- **Tribal-VHA Partnerships in Suicide Prevention Toolkit**
  - Provides resources to support VA Suicide Prevention Teams as they build partnerships with Tribes in community-based approaches to suicide prevention.
  - Many parts of the Toolkit may also be relevant for Tribal partners, rural Native Veterans, and Native Veteran family members.
  - Includes a guide to building Tribal partnerships; a guide to adapting the VA S.A.V.E. training for use with Tribal communities; and a guide to implementing the adapted S.A.V.E. training in Tribal settings. Download the [Tribal-VHA Partnerships in Suicide Prevention Toolkit](#).
- **Interagency "Gathering to Promote Suicide Prevention among American Indian and Alaskan Native Service members, Veterans, and their families."**
  - SAMHSA, VA, IHS, and other partners are collaborating to develop a suicide prevention initiative for Native Veterans. This event will bring together three Tribal partners alongside experts in the field to gather and learn from one another as they develop their vision for building more comprehensive support for Native Service Members, Veterans, and their families living in their communities.
- **Veteran and Military Suicide Prevention Task Force (Interagency Task Force)**
  - Cooperative effort of many government agencies toward a common goal: Reducing Veteran and Military Suicide.
  - Efforts are focused on five priority areas:
    - Improve Lethal Means Safety
    - Enhance Crisis Care and Facilitate Care Transitions
    - Increase Access to and Delivery of Effective Care
    - Address Upstream Risk and Protective Factors
    - Increase Research Coordination, Data Sharing, and Evaluation Efforts
- **The Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant is being utilized by the Choctaw Nation.**

**Televeda's Project Hózhó** - \$3 million dollar Mission Daybreak grant: The solution incorporates traditional healing practices like storytelling and talking-circle interventions to reduce Veteran suicide and improve access to VA resources.



**Veterans or Family Members**  
**Dial 988, Press 1**



# Office of Tribal Health Outreach & Engagements

The table below provides examples of OTH's Fiscal Year 2025 Outreach.

<p><b>Chicago Jesse Brown VAMC Native American Heritage Month Presentation – 11/24/24</b> Briefing to educate VA/VHA staff on OTH, Native Veteran Copayment Exemption, and Chicago area Native Veteran population data.</p>
<p><b>Bexar County Military and Veteran Services – 12/5/24</b> Meeting with County staff to identify outreach opportunities in support of Native Veterans.</p>
<p><b>Alaska National Guard Tribal Liaison – 12/23/24</b> Meeting to identify outreach opportunities in Alaska.</p>
<p><b>Arizona Area Outreach – 3/17/25-3/20/25</b> Met with Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui Tribes, O'odham Veterans Celebration Committee, and attended the Navajo Nation Women Veterans Conference. VHA and IHS staff met to discuss the VHA-IHS MOU, VHA Clinic-in-a-Clinic, and resource sharing agreements.</p>
<p><b>Tribal Self-Governance Conference – 4/9/25</b> Co-led a panel to discuss resources for homeless and at-risk Veterans, the VA Reimbursement Agreement Program, recommendations for providers, the Native Veteran Copayment Exemption, and the VHA Clinic-in-a-Clinic.</p>
<p><b>National Council of Urban Indian Health Conference – 4/23/25</b> Led a panel discussion and presentation on updates for Native Veterans, the VA Reimbursement Agreement Program, and the Native Veteran Copayment Exemption.</p>
<p><b>Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Conference – 4/30/25</b> Co-presented during a discussion on the MMIP endemic to educate VA/VHA staff on the effects on mental health of Native Veterans and their communities.</p>



# Native Veteran Resources

## Resources

Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988, Press 1

Apply for VA Health Care by Phone: 877-222-8387 (Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET)

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans: 877-424-3838

VA Homeless Programs Website: <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS>

HUD's Tribal HUD-VASH Website: <https://www.hud.gov/helping-americans/public-indian-housing-tribal-hud-vash>

VHA Office of Tribal Health Website: <https://www.va.gov/health/vha-tribal-health.asp>

VA Office of Tribal Government Relations: <https://www.va.gov/tribalgovernment/>

VA Mental Health Resources for Veterans: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mental-health-recovery/index.asp>

VHA Office of Rural Health Veteran Resources: <https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/vets/resources.asp>

National VA Chaplain Service: <https://www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/index.asp>

VA Community Care: <https://www.va.gov/communitycare/>

Beneficiary Travel: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/file-travel-pay-reimbursement/>

Veterans Benefits Administration: <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/>

VA Native American Direct Loan Program: <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/loan-types/native-american-direct-loan/>

VA PACT Act: <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>

VA Chaplain Directory: [https://www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/Chaplain\\_Directory.asp](https://www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/Chaplain_Directory.asp)

National Cemetery Administration: <https://www.cem.va.gov/>



Choose VA

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Wrap-Up

**Thank You**

**[VHAOfficeofTribalHealth@va.gov](mailto:VHAOfficeofTribalHealth@va.gov)**

~

**Questions?**



**Choose VA**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs