Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Veterans Health Administration

Tribal Health

Title: Walking Together: VHA's Commitment to American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans

Presentation for: NIHB CMS-I/T/U Training: Nashville-Bemidji

Presented by: Joshua Wear, National Outreach Manager, VHA Office of Tribal Health

Date: October 28, 2026

Land Acknowledgement

We recognize and honor the indigenous people of the Nashville and Bemidji areas - the Cherokee and Shawnee, the Ojibwe and Dakota, and all the indigenous people who know the area as their ancestral homeland. VA/VHA honors Native Veterans' extensive history of military service and is committed to promoting health care equity among American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans.

Source

Briefing 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, VA Women's Health Initiatives, 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
VA Payment Agreements / Contracts
VA Resources for Homeless and At-Risk Veterans/HUD-VASH
Suicide Prevention
Veterans Wellness Path App
Office of Tribal Health Outreach
Resources

VHA Office of Tribal Health

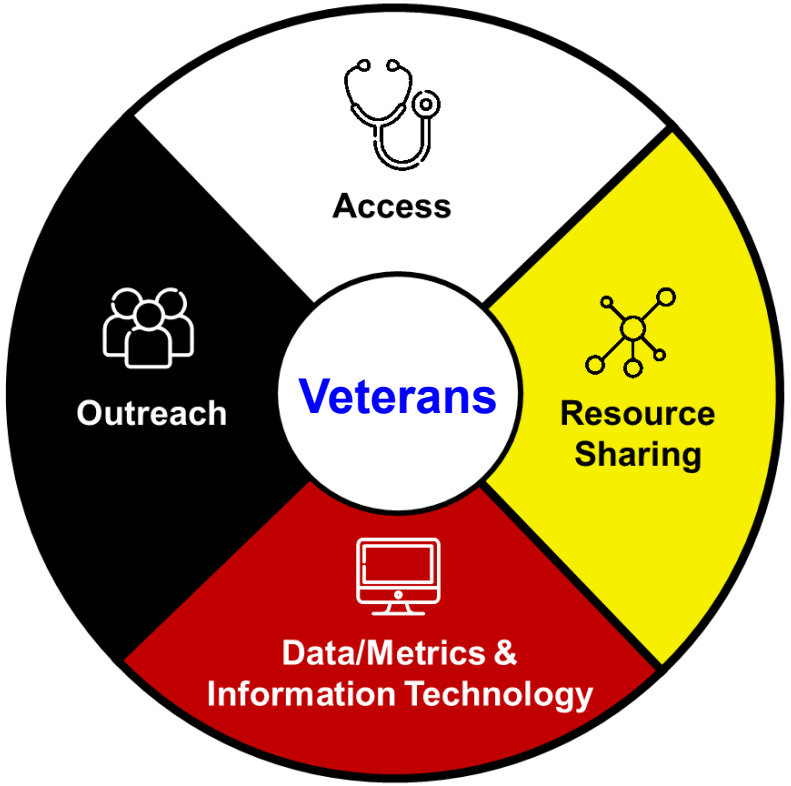
Mission
Honoring VHA's commitments to provide timely and quality health care access for American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans.

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

Scope
Expanding partnerships among VA/VHA, the White House, Federal and State Agencies, Tribal Health Programs, Urban Indian Organizations, Veteran Service Organizations, and other internal and external partners in accordance with statutory requirements.

- Created December 27, 2021
- VHA Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health
- Provides VA/VHA 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.



Example Partnerships

VHA-IHS MOU

- Mutual Goals:
  - Patients (Veterans)
  - Access
  - Resource Sharing
  - IT
- IHS Office for Indian Veterans Support (New)

VA TAC

- Subcommittees:
  - Administrative
  - Benefits and Cemetery
  - Healthcare

White House Council on Native American Affairs

- VHA/IHS Homelessness
- Urban Indian Organization Homeless Stand Downs (5)

Tribal Nations/Native Veterans

- Clinic-in-a-Clinic
- Outreach
- Advisory
  - VACO
  - VISN
  - VAMCs

VA/VHA

- VA Office of Rural Engagement
- VHA Chaplain Services
- Office of Rural Health
- Telehealth
- Whole Health
- Women's Health

Interagency Task Force

- Suicide Prevention
- Addressing Tribal Needs Strategic Plan
- Evidence-Based Treatment, Access and Engagement
- Lethal Means Paid Media

Copayment Exemption

- VHA began enrolling Native Veterans in the copay exemption in April 2023

VA Office of Tribal Government Relations

- VA-level office and partner with Office of Tribal Health
- Leads VA TAC, Tribal Consultation and Communication, Urban Confer, and outreach

VHA Office of Tribal Health Staff



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American Indian/Alaska Natives in the U.S. Military

- American Indians and Alaska Natives serve in the United States Armed Forces at five times the national average
- Military service is consistent among all 575 federally recognized Tribes
- Military service is viewed as an honorable tradition by many Native families and Tribes
- In 2017, 140,507 Veterans identified as American Indian/Alaska Native
- American Indian/Alaska Native citizens have served in the U.S. military in every major conflict for more than 200 years
- Of the 350,000 American Indian/Alaska Native citizens living in the U.S. during World War II, nearly 45,000 enlisted in the Armed Forces, making them the demographic with the highest rate of voluntary enlistment in the military throughout the entire war



Why Should Native Veterans Sign Up for VA Health Care?

- Largest integrated healthcare system in the United States that provides primary care and 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



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.

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/

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 copies of both documents to the address below:

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

Copayment Exemption Update

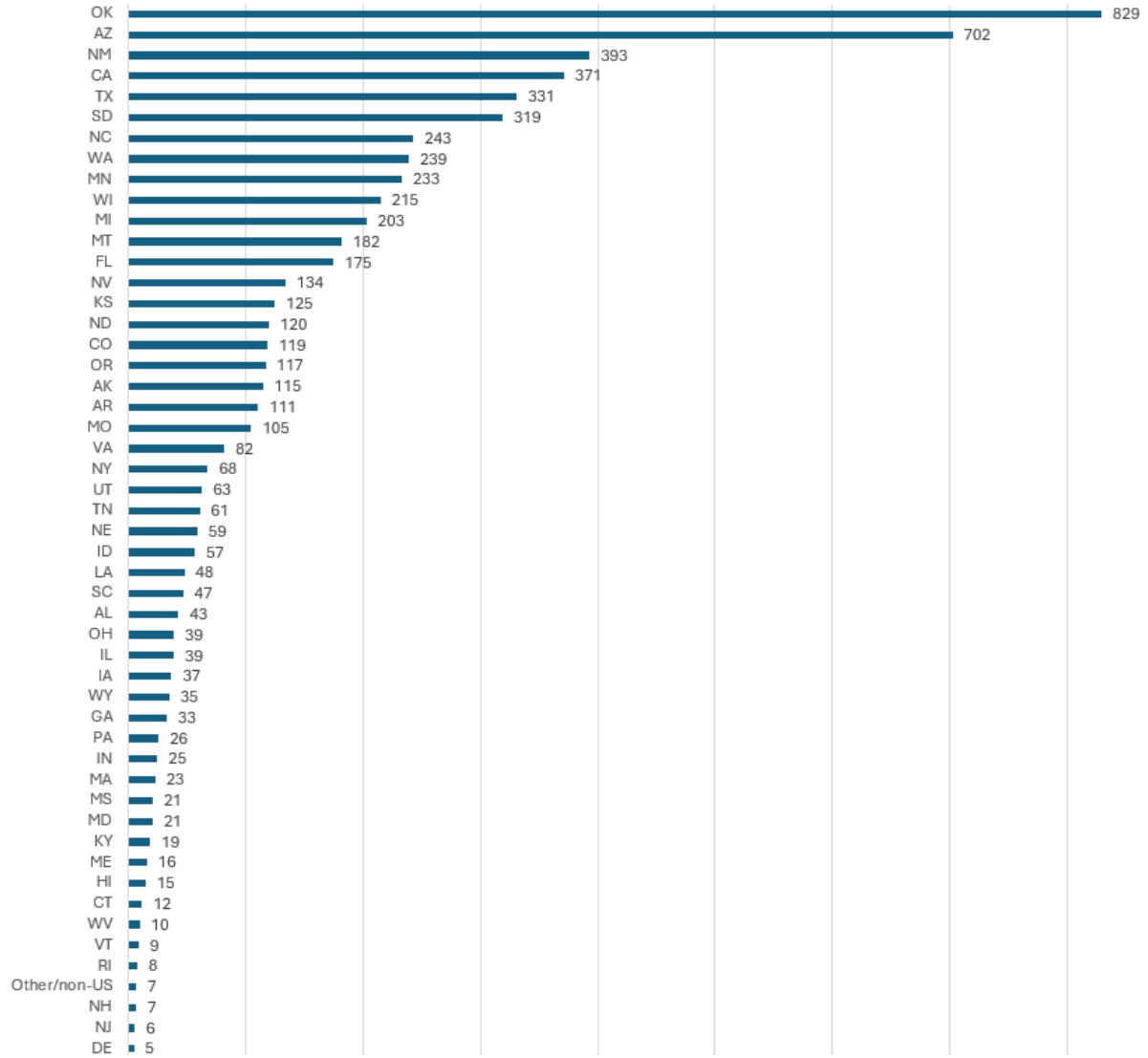
- :As of 3/31/26:
  - Total Applications Approved: 6,322
- As of 03/02/2026
  - Total Dollar Amount of Copayments Exempted and/or Reimbursed: $6.9M (387,550copayments)

More than 101K Native Veterans are enrolled in VA. Let's encourage them to apply…together!

Note: The Copayment Exemption is effective as of January 5, 2022.

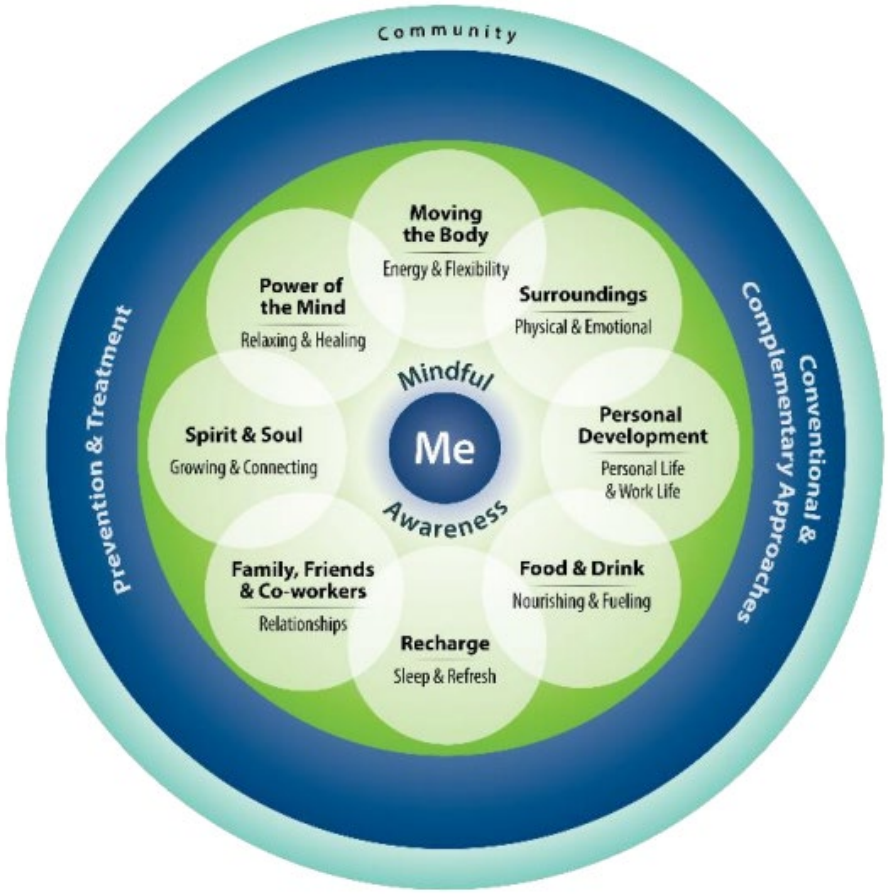
Native Veteran Copayment Exemption, Cont'd.

This graph displays the total number of Native Veterans approved for the copayment exemption, by state, as of March 31, 2026.



VHA Whole Health

- Whole Health (WH) 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.
- A WH personalized plan can include a Traditional Healing/Healer.
- Scan the QR with your mobile device to learn more and find VA WH facility contacts.





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 the first-ever national VHA Smudging SOP.
- Chaplains are on call 24/7.
- Scan the QR with your mobile device to contact your local Chaplain.
- For points of contact questions, please email VANationalChaplainStaff@va.gov.

Contact your local Chaplain:

VA Women's Health Initiatives

- **Interviews with Native Women Veterans on their use and perspectives of VHA in-person, virtual, and VA Community Care. Serves to:**
  - Improve access to VA health care for rural Native Women Veterans and reduce health outcome inconsistencies.
  - Inform development of interventions for improved access to VA care.
  - Address key barriers such as transportation, broadband, culturally informed care, and awareness of VHA services.
- **Use of Peer Intervention to improve access among rural women Veterans with psychological distress and unmet social needs. Serves to:**
  - Improve how rural women Veterans access and engage with mental health services and social resources. Specifically, it focuses on delivering a program called "Personalized Support for Progress" (PSP) through peers—people who have similar experiences.
- **Rural Native American Women Veterans' use of VHA under the MISSION Act. Serves to:**
  - Look into how Native women Veterans access healthcare through two main systems: VHA and IHS. The goal is to understand what roles these two services play in providing care, especially for Native women Veterans living in rural and urban areas.
- **Annual Tribal Women Veterans Summit**
  - Collaboratively hosted by VA and a Tribal Nation.
  - Dual Purpose:
    - Help teach all federal/state/Tribal/non-profit and community partners how to better address the needs of Native Women Veterans.
    - Allows Native women Veterans to have a voice by building a summit based on what they feel others need to know to better serve them.
  - Discussions are based on the requests of Native women Veterans, e.g.:
    - Military culture and traditional Culture – addressing gaps and barriers
    - Women Veterans Claims – understanding what to ask, how to apply, become your own advocate
    - Tying historical/military trauma together and how it affects women Veterans

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

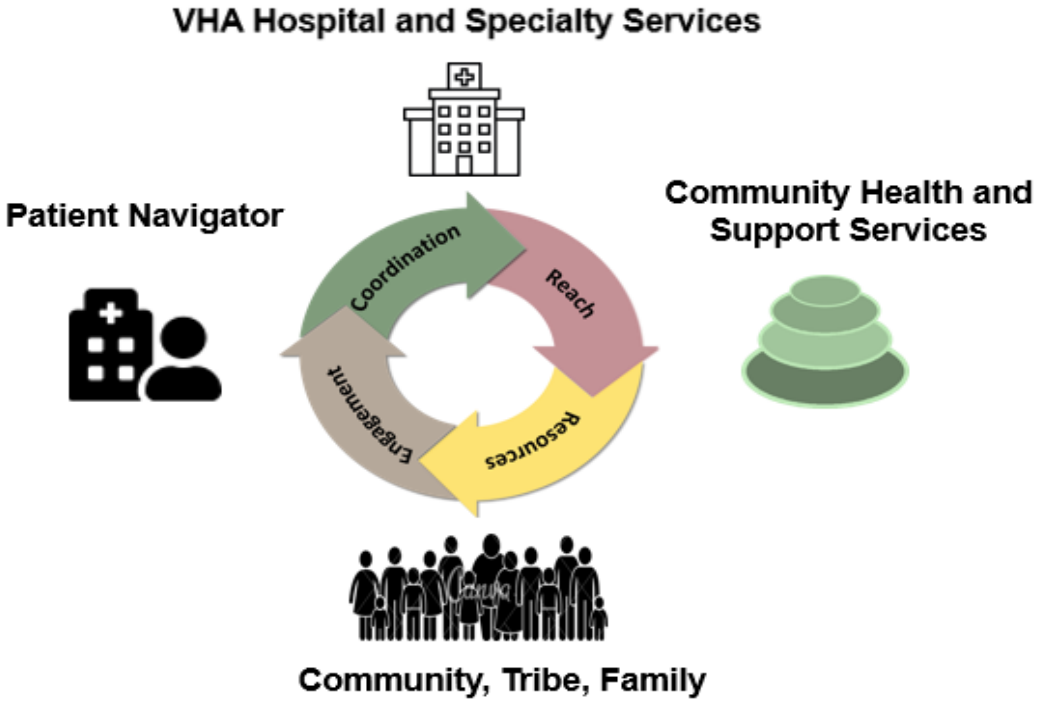


About the Rural Native Veteran Health Care Navigator Program

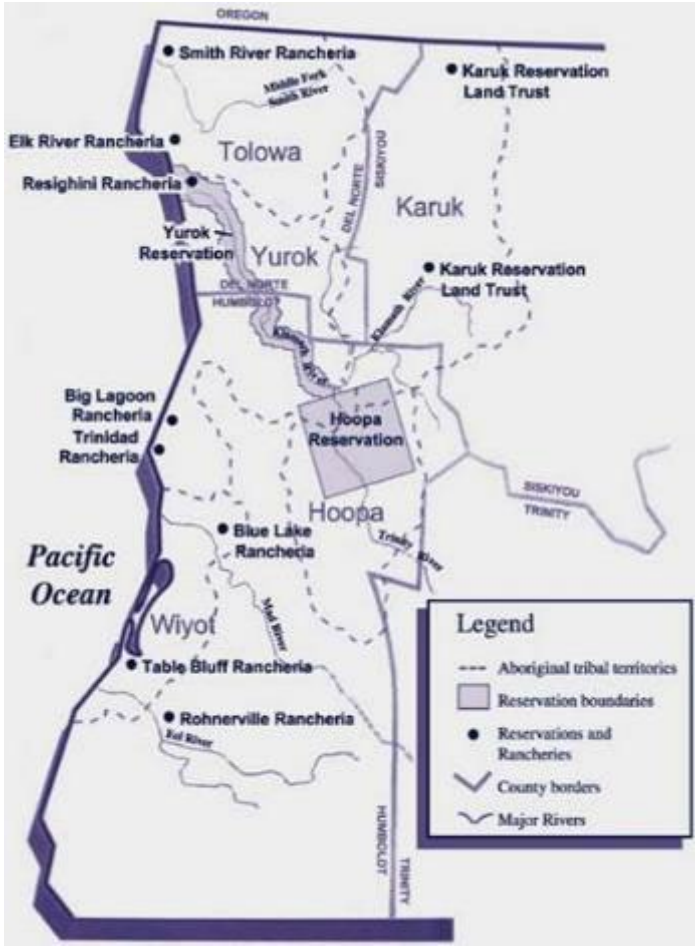
The overall project goal is to pilot, refine, and disseminate an innovative Rural Native Veteran (RNV) Health Care Navigator Program to increase RNV access to healthcare and Veteran-associated resources.

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

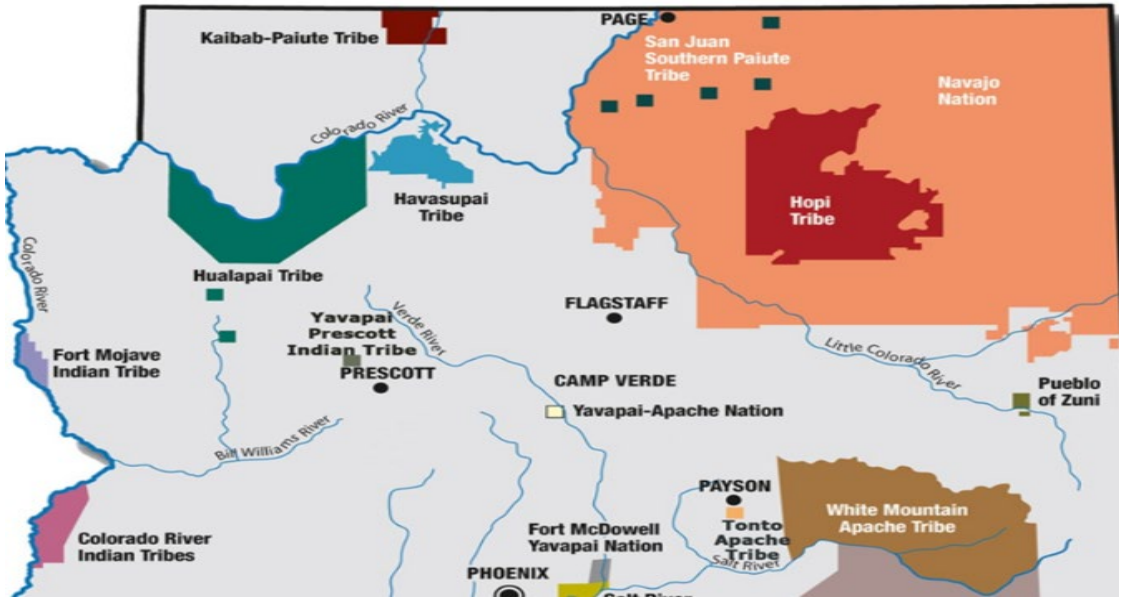


Program Status

- 2 active sites with Navigators in the field
  - NAVAHCS
  - San Francisco VA Healthcare System: Eureka, CA CBOC

- Developing proposal for wider dissemination



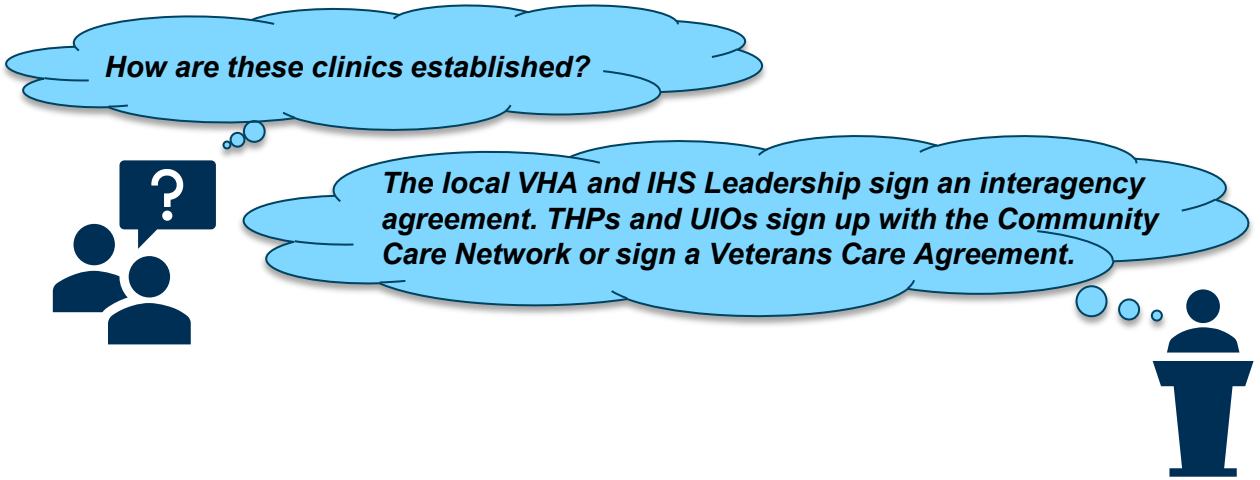


Clinic-in-a-Clinic

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





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. Mojave 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.

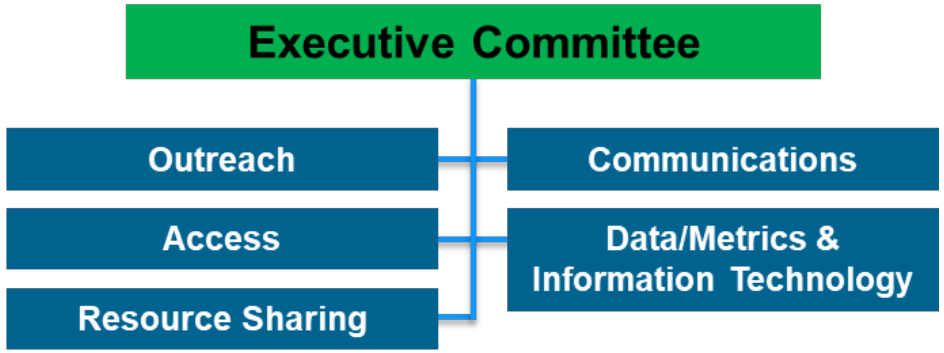
ACCESS: Leverage strengths of VHA and IHS at the national, regional and local levels to support the efficient delivery of timely and optimal clinical care.

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

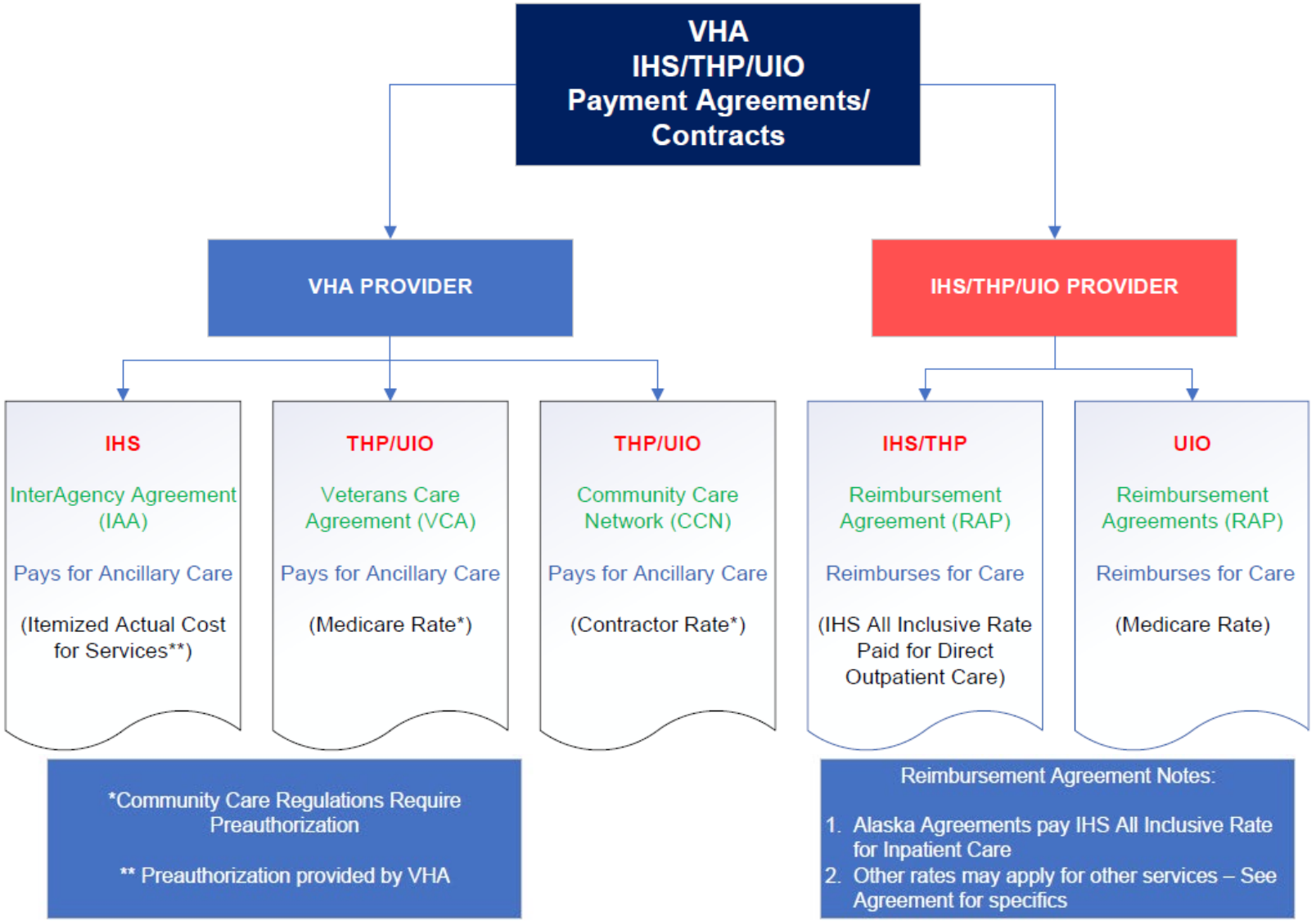
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: Integrate electronic health records and other systems that affect the health care of Native Veterans.

How We Implement

VHA-IHS MOU Structure



VA Payment Agreements / Contracts



Permanent Housing through HUD-VASH

- 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 or visit www.va.gov/homeless.

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

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.

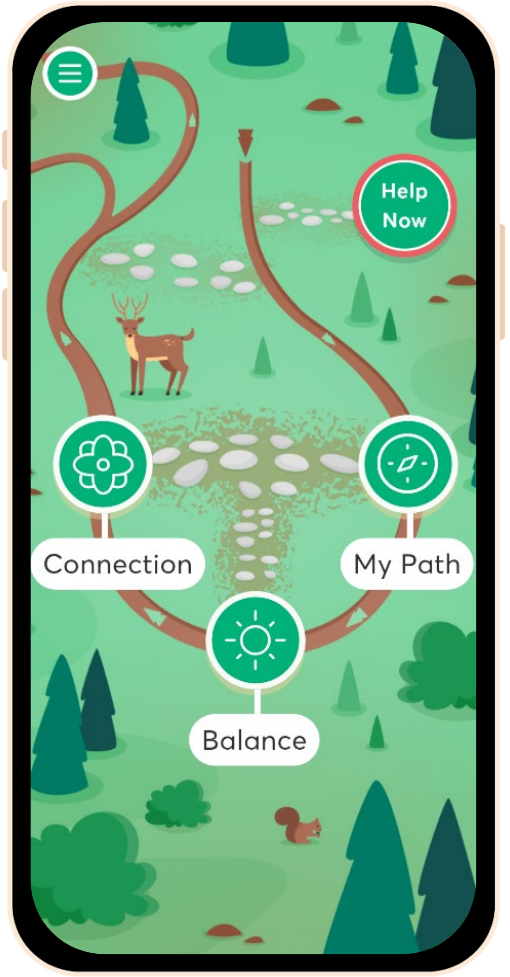
- **Grants**
  - Mission Daybreak Grants are being utilized by the Navajo Nation, Choctaw Nation of OK, and Cherokee Nation (OK).
  - Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant is being utilized by the Choctaw Nation.

Veterans Wellness Path App

- Created for Native Veterans, their families, and communities.
- Supports the transition from military service to home, encourages balance and connection with self, family, community, and environment.
- Features:
  - Daily check-ins and mental health screeners
  - Exercises to heal the body, mind, emotions, and spirit
  - Story telling
  - Tips for connection
- Scan the QR with your mobile device to download the app.

Download on the App Store

Get it on Google play



Veterans or Family Members
Dial 988, Press 1

Office of Tribal Health Outreach & Engagements

The table below provides examples of OTH's Fiscal Year 2026 outreach.

VAH/Hopi Tribal Meeting – 3/16/2026
Tribal Self-Governance Conference and Panel – 4/8/25
Illinois Veterans Benefits Resource Fair – 4/13/26
Veterans Bi-Monthly Virtual Meeting (Illiana Health Care System collaboration)
MMIP 2026 VHA Virtual Education Event – 5/5/26
CalVet Tribal Veterans Mental Health Summit – 5/15/26
Traditional Native Hawaiian Ceremony Planning Meetings – June/July 2026

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)
Native Veteran Copayment Exemption: https://www.va.gov/resources/copay-exemptions-for-american-indian-and-alaska-native-veterans/
Native Veteran Suicide Prevention Resources (VHA): https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/clinical/populations/native-americans.asp
National Call Center for Homeless Veterans: 877-424-3838
VA Homeless Programs: https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS
HUD's Tribal HUD-VASH: https://www.hud.gov/helping-americans/public-indian-housing-tribal-hud-vash
VHA Office of Tribal Health: 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
National Cemetery Administration: https://www.cem.va.gov/

Wrap-Up

Thank You

VHAOfficeofTribalHealth@va.gov

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Questions?