



**ALASKA VA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM BRIEF**  
**for**  
**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE HOUSE**  
**MILITARY & VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

February 26, 2015



**VA**  
HEALTH  
CARE

Defining  
**EXCELLENCE**  
in the 21st Century



# VA Values



## *Because I care, I will act with:*

- **I-ntegrity** - Act with high moral principle. Adhere to highest professional standards. Work to maintain trust and confidence of everyone.
- **C-ommitment** - Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA's mission. Fulfill my individual and my organizational responsibilities.
- **A-dvocacy** - Be fully Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.
- **R-espect** - Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.
- **E-xcellence** - Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them."

# AVAHS Mission, Vision and Goals

- **Mission:** Honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.
- **Vision:**
  - VHA will continue to be the benchmark of excellence and value in health care and benefits by providing exemplary services that are both patient-centered and evidence-based.
  - This care will be delivered by engaged, collaborative teams in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery and continuous improvement.
  - It will emphasize prevention and population health and contribute to the Nation's well-being through education, research and service in national emergencies.
- **Strategic Goals:**
  - Provide Veterans Personalized, Proactive, Patient-Driven Health Care
  - Achieve Measureable Improvements in Health Outcomes
  - Align Resources to Deliver Sustained Value to Veterans

# Department of Veteran Affairs In Alaska

## **Veterans Health Administration (VHA)**

**Susan M. Yeager,  
Director**

**Alaska VA  
Healthcare System**

**Anchorage, AK**

## **Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA)**

**Karl Franzelter, Acting Director  
Anchorage Regional Office  
(remotely managed from  
Salt Lake City, UT)**

**Chad Pomelow  
VBA Service Center Manager  
Anchorage, AK**

**Tammy Tanner  
Vocational Rehab. &  
Employment Officer  
Anchorage, AK**

## **National Cemetery Administration (NCA)**

**Virginia Walker,  
Director**

**Fort Richardson  
and Sitka, AK**

# Suicide Prevention at the Alaska VA

- The Suicide Prevention Program was started in 2007 after a rise in Active Duty and Veteran suicides as a congressional mandate
- Suicide prevention coordinator (SPC) responds to every Veterans Crisis Line referral
- Local Suicide Prevention Coordinator
- Education
  - Operation SAVE training, a suicide prevention gatekeeper training, for all VA Employees and in the community (Identify Signs of Suicidal Thinking, Ask the Question, Validate the Veterans Experience and Encourage and Expedite getting help)
  - Means restriction and gun locks
  - Identify training needs relating to prevention and management of suicide

# Suicide Prevention at the Alaska VA

- Outreach and Partnership with local agencies
  - Participation in the Anchorage Suicide Prevention Coalition and the BH Alliance monthly
  - Provide coordination with local hospitals to act liaison for Veterans who are in an inpatient MH hospitals
- Assist Veterans in crisis
  - At the Anchorage clinic MH triage is available to assist Veterans in crisis
  - MH triage providers include Social Workers, Psychologists and Psychiatrists
- Ensure linkage with MH treatment
  - Facilitate the Wise Warrior Group weekly which focuses on safety and recovery plans



# Suicide Prevention at the Alaska VA

- Report on a monthly basis to MH leadership and the National Suicide Prevention Coordinator attempts and completions in addition to outreach efforts
- Train and support clinical staff
  - Ensure providers follow up on missed appointments for high risk Veterans
  - Ensure a safety plan is completed with the Veteran and their provider

# Mail Out Program

- Monthly cards with Recovery and Wellness theme are sent by the Suicide Prevention Program to all Alaska Veterans who have been identified as High Risk, plus others as recommended by clinicians, since 2009
  - Over 200 cards are sent each month
- Art work for cards is Veteran-produced, selected from entries in the annual card art collection
- SPC partners with the Veterans Mental Health Wellness Council to conduct the card art collection and select cards for the next FY
- SPC and Local Recovery Coordinator collaborate on providing wellness oriented messages on the monthly cards



# Clay Hunt Act

- Anticipated Mental Health enhancements
  - VA will have an independent third party conduct annual evaluations of the MH care and SP programs
  - VA will publish an internet website that serves as a centralized source to provide Veterans with information regarding all MH services provided by the VA and will be updated at least every 90 days
  - VA will collaborate with non profit MH organizations in Suicide Prevention efforts
- Combat Veterans who were discharged between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 and January 1<sup>st</sup> 2011 and did not enroll in the VA during their 5 year period of eligibility will have an additional year to enroll which begins on the date of enactment of the Act (February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015)

# Clay Hunt Act

- VA will conduct a pilot program for the repayment of educational loans for certain psychiatrists in VA. The pilot will pay up to \$30,000 of educational loan expenses per year and would require a service obligation period. Eligible individuals would include those licensed or eligible for licensure to practice psychiatric medicine in VA or those who are enrolled in the final year of a residency program leading to a specialty qualification in psychiatric medicine. VA will provide an initial and a final report addressing the results of the pilot program.



# QUESTIONS?

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or

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