



Serving Veterans in Health Centers: A Compendium of Success Stories

July 2022

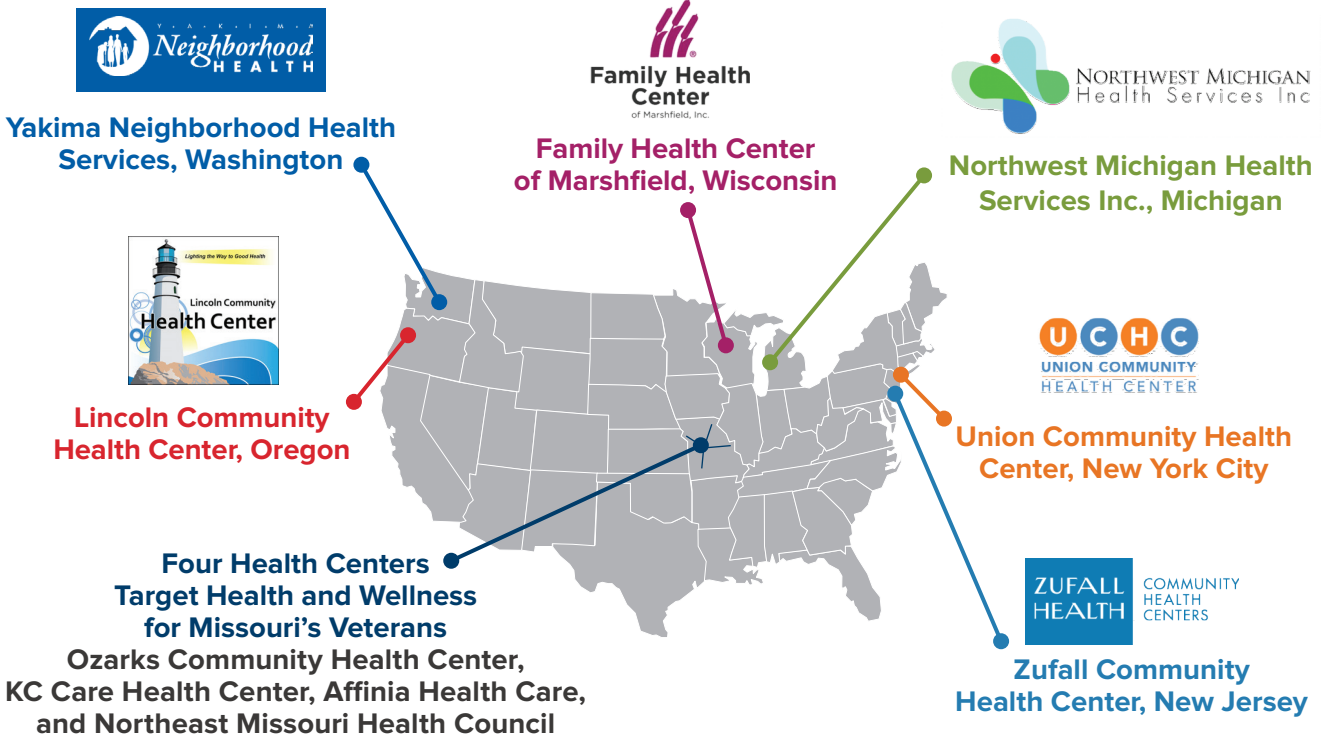
There are more than 19 million Veterans in the United States, a demographic which increasingly reflects our country’s diversity and health center population in terms of age, sex, race, ethnicity, etc. The most recent Uniform Data System (UDS) report from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) shows that nationally, health centers serve nearly 400,000 patients who identify as Veterans, a number which represents a 76% increase between 2008 and 2020.

Veterans often have unique medical, behavioral, and social service needs. As such, caring for our Veteran patients starts with assessing their needs and may require a special effort in connecting the patchwork of services and benefits available to Veterans. Thankfully, there are a significant number of health centers around the country doing just that - helping to establish innovative partnerships, funding relationships, and Veterans’ initiatives steered by dedicated and passionate leadership and frontline staff, all the while ensuring that Veterans receive the compassionate and timely care they deserve.

NACHC has compiled ten of these “success stories” to share how health centers today are successfully supporting Veterans in their local communities.

This product is an update to the July 2020 version.

Health Center Spotlights



Family Health Center of Marshfield

Transforming Lives: Improving Veterans Access to Oral Health Care



The doors of Family Health Center (FHC) in Wisconsin first opened on March 1, 1974 as part of a partnership with Marshfield Clinic and the Greater Marshfield Community Health Plan with a shared mission to provide comprehensive health services.

Following the publication of the [Surgeon General's Oral Health in America Report in 2000](#) and understanding that few of our nation's veterans have access to VA dental benefits, FHC committed to bridge that gap with a goal to assure that no veteran in the state of Wisconsin need to go without access to quality dental services.

Operating 10 dental sites serving an area the size of Maine, Family Health Center served 46,000 dental patients in 2021. Despite the many challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, FHC marched on to support Wisconsin's most vulnerable patients. The work done by FHC of Marshfield was featured in a [2021 National Institutes of Health report on "Oral Health in America."](#) Specifically, the report cites FHC's partnerships with dental schools, offering students population-based clinical rotations in rural health care locations.

FHC's innovative work also received commendation from the State. For two years running (2021-2022), the Governor of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) awarded FHC with grant funding to help offset the cost of dental care for low-income veterans. This grant is certainly going a long way for those patients who rely on dental care access for general oral health, employment opportunities, and improved quality of life.

To describe one of many case examples where dental care has had a positive cascading effect on peoples' lives, one patient arrived at an FHC dental clinic unemployed, depressed, and with very poor oral health. After receiving comprehensive care, the patient reported securing a job and having a much better outlook on life!

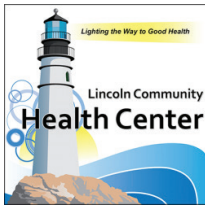


Gov. Evers, WDVA Announce More Than \$549,000 in Grants to 14 Organizations Helping Wisconsin Veterans and Families

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers and Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) Secretary Mary Kolar today announced \$549,560 in grants to 14 registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations that provide financial assistance, entrepreneurship training, or other services to Wisconsin veterans and their families.

Lincoln Community Health Center, Oregon

Caring for Veterans Where They Live



Lincoln Community Health Center (LCHC) strives to improve the quality of health of its community members, whatever their financial status, by providing quality primary care, mental health, addiction, and dental services. Since

LCHC sits nearly 90 miles away from the nearest VA Medical Center, in May 2010, leaders from LCHC, alongside champions within the Portland VA Healthcare System (PVAHCS), formed a partnership that established a one-of-a-kind Community Health Center/VA Clinic to serve more Veterans in the central coast of Oregon.



The partnership works like this: LCHC provides a facility and support staff (nurses, Certified Medical Assistants, clinic manager and administrative support) and the Portland VAHCS provides a physician along with all regular patient care equipment (EKGs, vital sign monitors, exam tables, etc.). Both organizations share portions of administrative expenses required for day-to-day operations. Together, LCHC and PVAHCS serve veterans where they live.

In all, the Lincoln Community VA Health Clinic serves 1,365 unique veteran patients at two locations (Newport and Lincoln City) and can provide laboratory services to any veteran enrolled in VA health care. Additionally, LCHC has designated a space for V-Tel services where any VA-enrolled patient can conduct a telehealth visit with their mental health provider and/or other medical specialty not requiring an in-person visit. To date, it is the only clinic of its kind in the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an adaptation from the traditional clinic setting to home-based, virtual health services wherever possible. LCHC and PVAHCS staff developed a strategy using both new and existing technologies and processes to educate veterans on how to use virtual systems and seamlessly integrate them into their clinical model, ensuring that no gaps in care were encountered.

Lincoln Community Health Center continues to serve veterans where they live by maintaining close relationships with a variety of sub-organizations within the PVAHCS such as VA-run Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) enrollment offices and patient advocates.

Point of Contact: Jayne Romero, Health & Human Services Director
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Northwest Michigan Health Services Inc.

Victors for Veterans: Empowering Michigan's Veterans with Comprehensive Whole Health and Oral Care



For over 50 years, Northwest Michigan Health Services Inc. (NMHSI) has provided culturally appropriate primary medical and dental care, serving seven counties in northwest lower Michigan. NMHSI is proud to serve Veterans with quality, patient-centered health care.



Since 2017, NMHSI has served more than 250 veterans with free and comprehensive dental care as part of its "Victors for Veterans" program with donated treatment plans equating to roughly \$5,000 per patient. In the 2021-2022 program alone, NMHSI provided treatment to Veterans totaling nearly \$283,000, the program's biggest financial donation of annual services yet. The size of this year's donation is due in large part by restrictions placed on patients by the COVID-19 pandemic – delayed care is costing more and more patients their health.

Using only word-of-mouth to market the program, NMHSI enrolls each Veteran to receive 12 months of free dental services with a whole-health focus to include blood pressure readings, glucose tests, and clinical referrals, in addition to oral care. At the beginning of the program year each May, NMHSI works with each Veteran to develop an individualized treatment plan over the following 12 months until the patient receives all required care and better health. NMHSI closes the dental clinic to all non-Veteran patients two Fridays each month to serve program participants. Approximately 50 patients complete their treatment each year, where the value of donated services provided is estimated to be over \$210,000 annually. In addition to financial support by corporate donors and the Delta Dental Foundation, NMHSI relies on a dedicated group of volunteer dentists, dental assistants, and dental students.



A feature of this program is NMHSI's robust partnership with the state university to recruit passionate dental students. Speaking of his experience with the program, one future dentist said, "This has been an excellent learning experience [providing] transparent insight into the access to care issues across our state and our nation."

Point of Contact: Jennifer Kerns, Dental Outreach Coordinator
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Union Community Health Center, New York City

Serving Veterans of the Bronx

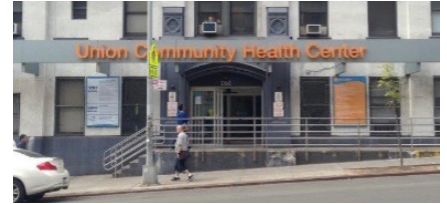


Union Community Health Center (UNION) has served the diverse Bronx community with its diverse health needs since 1909; in 2021, UNION provided health services to 38,000 patients. Recognizing that Veterans in a large urban center such as New York City face challenges with transportation, trouble navigating the VA benefits enrollment process, and often having unique needs representative of city living, UNION thrust itself into action to close the barrier gap and ensure the 25,000 Veterans in Bronx County remain aware and connected.



What Is A Veteran?

A "Veteran" - whether active duty, discharged, retired, or reserve - is someone who, at one point in his life, wrote a blank check made payable to "The United States of America," for an amount of "up to, and including his life."



In 2019, UNION began the groundwork to establish a Veteran Healthcare Liaison program dedicated to providing wraparound case management services for Veterans to include medical care, dental care, employment and housing assistance, and legal services. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and its damaging effect on staffing as well as in-person servicing shifted the mission to targeted outreach to all Veterans, regardless of income or insurance status. Outreach to Bronx-area Veterans proved to be a fruitful undertaking, despite the challenges presented by a global pandemic. Outreach efforts accounted for an 80% increase in number of Veterans served at UNION since 2020. This progress was a direct result of strong ties to the community and engagement with a variety of community organizations, community events, and even colleges to promote the Veteran Healthcare Liaison program and the services it offers.



As a participant of several of New York City's "Community Boards," or official municipal bodies that advise elected officials and government agencies on matters affecting the social welfare of the district, UNION staff continue to advocate that no Veteran is left behind. Recent efforts have led to community board support for a New York City Council budget proposal that would empower UNION to help Veterans utilize telehealth capabilities, including providing them with tablets and training on how to use them. This is an effort that will help address a huge barrier to digital care for Veterans and help close the digital divide.

In addition, UNION leadership raises awareness at the local, state, and federal levels to help elected officials and agencies address the full spectrum of barriers Veterans too often face.

Yakima Neighborhood Health Services, Washington Leveraging Public-Private Partnerships to Better Serve Veterans



Established in 1975 in a small house, the Yakima Neighborhood Health Services (YNHS) today serves more than 23,000 patients with more than 90,000 visits annually. Engrained in its commitment to providing affordable, accessible, quality health care to the underserved, is its mission to improve the lives of the Veteran community. In 2021, YNHS, in partnership with the Yakima Housing Authority (YHA), VFW



Post 379, and the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), celebrated a ribbon cutting for the new Veteran services campus honoring one of its esteemed residents, calling it the Chuck Austin Place.

Constructed around a repurposed armory, the facility boasts 41 newly constructed, permanent supportive housing units, medical, dental, and mental health treatment rooms with on-site care coordination provided by YNHS, and a wide variety of service providers such as Veteran Service Officers and Organizations (VSOs,) who conduct VA-case management and other supportive service for veterans and their families. In addition, the facility offers veteran residents access to on-site laundry, a dog run, library, garden, community gathering spaces, and a fitness center.

The Chuck Austin Place also serves the veteran community beyond the campus boundaries. Any veteran residing in the greater Yakima County area can receive care or services provided by the dedicated on-site staff.

The Chuck Austin Place was made possible through a multitude of partnerships across several agencies united by their commitment to the local Veteran Stand Down Event held once a year in Yakima. Stand Downs are annual veteran benefit “expos” intended to unite veterans and showcase the many benefits they may not have otherwise been aware of. In gathering a diverse group of organizations with a mission to help Veterans, the providers and stakeholders alike were able to share challenges and brainstorm solutions within a collaborative environment.

Point of Contact: Rhonda Hauff, CEO
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Zufall Community Health Centers

A VA Partnership to Advance Comprehensive Dental Services for Veterans—Zufall Community Health Center, New Jersey



Co-founded in 1990 by a WWII Veteran and retired physician, Zufall Health provides quality, affordable, and culturally competent medical and oral health care to people and communities who experience barriers to care.

With its unwavering goal to serve and care for veterans using a whole health approach, Zufall Health was chosen by the Veterans Administration (VA) to participate in a multi-year (2021-2026) pilot program focused on comprehensive veteran oral health called VETSmile. In this pilot, the VA leverages its position to conduct outreach to eligible veterans who are not otherwise eligible for VHA-provided dental care, and connect them with community dental care providers such as Zufall Health.



With support from New Jersey charities and the Delta Dental Community Care Foundation, Zufall Health can take on additional patients referred by VETSmile. In its first year of the pilot, Zufall Health expects to see approximately 500 new patients, helping them to establish a “dental home” and care plan. In this model, patients are not simply seen without any follow-up. Zufall Health’s dental care providers oversee case management and endeavor to maintain patient satisfaction.



Not only will Zufall Health provide necessary oral health care to veterans who were not receiving care before the VETSmile pilot began, but it will also be supporting the ongoing work at the VA to understand to what extent VA-provided dental care is feasible and sustainable for veterans outside of the VHA network. Zufall Health expects to participate in program evaluation and data analysis to inform those significant decisions.

In addition to the VetSmile project, Zufall’s day-to-day operations in support of veteran oral health care continues on with the Dental Van, a mobile unit established at Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) to serve veterans with oral health care services at primary care centers.

Point of Contact: Eva Turbiner, President and CEO
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The Missouri Story

Four Health Centers Target Health and Wellness for Missouri's Veterans

The Missouri Primary Care Association (MPCA) celebrates nearly 38 years of advocacy and support for its network of 28 Community Health Centers (CHCs), serving more than 10,000 Missourian Veterans in 2020. With a Veteran population of more than 450,000 (roughly 9% of the state's total population), MPCA has made substantial efforts over the years to support its Veteran residents through a myriad of innovative programs and partnerships. We profile 4 Missouri FQHCs that endeavor every day to transform the lives of those who served.



Point of Contact: Rodney Hummer, Vice President of Strategy, Missouri PCA
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Ozarks Community Health Center

Ozarks Community Health Center (OCHC) strives to give every patient the highest level of care in the surrounding community in southwest Missouri regardless of background. OCHC has been a credentialed partner of the Veterans Administration since 2014, meaning OCHC is a member of the VA Community Care Network (CCN). As a CCN preferred provider, OCHC utilizes the CCN as a contract vehicle to purchase care for Veterans at its facility, at no cost to OCHC. OCHC serves a rural population, with the closest VA medical facility roughly 2 hours away. More than 100 Veterans a year walk through the doors of OCHC to receive the benefit



of free dental and medical services. And in this primarily rural area, word of mouth is key to patient outreach. Patients – especially older Veterans – often do not have reliable transportation to get to the clinic and may delay seeking care. Fortunately, OCHC provides gas cards to eligible patients to help them get the care they need at the right time.

The partnership with VA has served OCHC's Veteran patients well. Veterans cite feeling welcome at OCHC due to the facility hiring providers focused not just on Veteran health care, but whole health and quality of life issues. In one instance, OCHC was able to coordinate with the VA to authorize a home health therapist for an 88-year-old Veteran patient who did not want to be admitted into a nursing home and be away from his wife. For this reason, Veterans are happy to find a medical home in OCHC, where they are continually treated with dignity and respect.

The Missouri Story

KC Care Health Center

For over 50 years, KC Care Health Center (KC CARE) has provided integrated and personalized health services to everyone in the community, including Veterans. Currently, KC CARE organizes two Veteran health-focused programs. The first entails a partnership with the Veterans Community Project (VCP), a non-profit organization dedicated to ending Veteran homelessness in the U.S by providing one-stop-shop help centers for support services and tiny home communities for the unhoused. In its capacity as a health center, KC CARE offers oral screenings and referrals at VCP's centers. In addition, KC CARE conducts community outreach events to include health screenings as well as helping Veterans to enroll as new patients in the KC CARE system. In the fall of 2022, KC CARE anticipates adding a mobile medical unit to its range of services in an effort to serve even more Veterans.



The second program involves a partnership with the Veterans Administration through the VETSmile program, a pilot program that works to increase Veteran access to comprehensive oral healthcare. VETSmile allows VA-enrolled Veterans who are not eligible for dental services at VA facilities access to affordable care at community health centers. The partnership between VETSmile and KC CARE will increase access for eligible Veterans in the region and help them establish a dental home for continuous care.




These two programs – while in their nascent stages – will underpin a multifaceted spectrum of care focused on the whole person for Veterans in the community. KC CARE acknowledges that program success thus far has relied on building relationships with community partners already doing innovative things as well as having providers who truly understand the barriers Veterans – especially older Veterans – face, utilizing a trauma-informed model of care.

The Missouri Story

Affinia Healthcare

For more than 100 years, Affinia Healthcare (Affinia) has provided primary and preventive health services to the residents of St. Louis, Missouri. Affinia began its journey with targeted Veteran care in 2016, when it hosted its first Veteran's Day outreach event offering free dentures to those in need. In 2017, a unique partnership was forged between Affinia and A.T. Still University's Missouri School of Dental and Oral Health (MOSDOH), where both could serve the Veteran population strategically. The program construct involves MOSDOH students volunteering their time to provide low-cost and free dental care. In return, students are given valuable experience practicing dentistry for the underserved and supporting their community. The partnership allows MOSDOH to focus on the educational aspects of comprehensive patient care, while Affinia manages the clinical operations.

Much of the success of the "Smiles for Veterans" program can be attributed to its founder and champion, Dr. Herbert Silva. A Marine Corps Veteran himself, Dr. Silva resolved to "give back" to his community; and has done so exponentially. Since its inception, the program has served over 900 veterans with free and low-cost dental services, a value of nearly one million dollars. Recognized as a powerful asset to the community, the program has been awarded individual and corporate donations. Still, Dr. Silva continues to fundraise and negotiate with vendors such as laboratories and suppliers to provide free and discounted rates and create a sustainable path for continuous, comprehensive care for Veterans in Missouri.




FREE DENTAL EXAMS FOR VETERANS

Nov. 13, 2021


St. Louis Dental Center
1500 Park Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63104

- Registration, 7:30-11:00 a.m.
- Call 314.685.3553 to pre-register.
- Walk-ins welcome until 11:00 a.m.
- Please bring a photo ID and your veteran certification form (DD-214) or VA card.
- Veterans will receive a FREE dental screening/exam.
- Affinia Healthcare's Outreach team will be on hand to assist with Medicaid applications for uninsured adults.


For more information, call 314.685.3553.
atsu.edu/support-mosdoh-vets



St. Louis Dental Center
A partnership of A.T. Still University
and Affinia Healthcare



AFFINIA
HEALTHCARE



ATSU Missouri School of
Dentistry & Oral Health

The Missouri Story

Northeast Missouri Health Council

The Northeast Missouri Health Council (NHMC) was established in 1968 to provide quality health care to the residents of Northeast Missouri. NHMC has rapidly expanded over the years to serve an 11-county area with a focus on patient, community, and employee health. Recognizing a need for veteran-focused health care, a community effort landed a relationship with the VA in 1999 to establish a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic, or CBOC, to better serve veterans unable to travel the long distance to a VA Medical Center. Quite divergent to most CBOCs around the country in which the VA owns and operates the CBOC, NMHC was awarded a multi-year contract to run all of the clinical and administrative operations.

This unique system has served the veteran population well. With its loyal patient base, NMHC serves approximately 2,200 patients annually. And once served at the CBOC, patients can be referred to other providers within the NMHC system, essentially establishing a patient-first medical home. Additionally, the contractual relationship with the VA allows NMHC to leverage VA systems and their effective models of care such as telemedicine – a model used long before the concept of virtual health became commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the VA refers eligible patients to the CBOC, NMHC continues to conduct outreach events for those veterans who may not be aware such a veteran-focused clinic exists.

