

San Francisco VA Health Care System

# ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2019

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs



## LEADERSHIP TEAM

**DR. BRUCE OVBIAGELE**  
*Chief of Staff*

**BONNIE S. GRAHAM**  
*Health Care  
System Director*

**JIA F. LI**  
*Deputy Director*

**STEPHEN J. RUGGIRELLO**  
*Associate Director*

**MARY ANN NIHART**  
*Associate Director for  
Patient Care Services/  
Nurse Executive*

## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to San Francisco VA Health Care System's Annual Report for fiscal year 2019.

Our mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being. In early 2019, our health care system adopted a new motto that captures what we do for America's Veterans: "Helping Heroes Heal through Innovation, Compassion and Partnership." I feel strongly that all these ingredients are essential for us to better serve our Veterans and address their health care needs in a timely, caring and collaborative manner.

Throughout the last fiscal year, we focused our efforts on strengthening strategic partnerships in the communities we serve Veterans, expanding the number of innovative modalities that enable us to care for more Veterans and encouraging employees to better partner with Veterans in developing compassionate, personalized treatment plans.

One of the most important priorities for our Health Care System is to continue to ensure we hire and retain the very best clinical staff, administrators, and support staff. The high cost of living in the San Francisco Bay Area makes this a challenge. However, we have identified some very innovative ways to overcome these barriers. We continue to focus on making the San Francisco VA Health Care System a preferred place to work. Our Veterans and their families deserve nothing less.

We designed this inaugural report with our Veterans and their families in mind. Rather than share just metrics and operational data, I hope this report illustrates the innovation, compassion and partnership of our many dedicated employees, volunteers, residents and trainees at the San Francisco VA Medical Center and our community-based outpatient clinics in Clearlake, Eureka, San Bruno, Downtown San Francisco, Santa Rosa and Ukiah. Our employees across the San Francisco VA Health Care System are the reason Veterans choose and trust us with their health care.

Thank you for your continued support of the San Francisco VA Health Care System and the Veterans and their families we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bonnie S. Graham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bonnie S. Graham, MBA  
Health Care System Director

HELPING HEROES  
HEAL THROUGH  
INNOVATION,  
COMPASSION AND  
PARTNERSHIP



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# OUR MISSION

The San Francisco VA Health Care System's mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.





An aerial photograph of the San Francisco VA Medical Center. The main building is a large, multi-story, light-colored structure with many windows. It is surrounded by green trees and other smaller buildings. In the background, the city of San Francisco is visible, including the Golden Gate Bridge and the bay. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

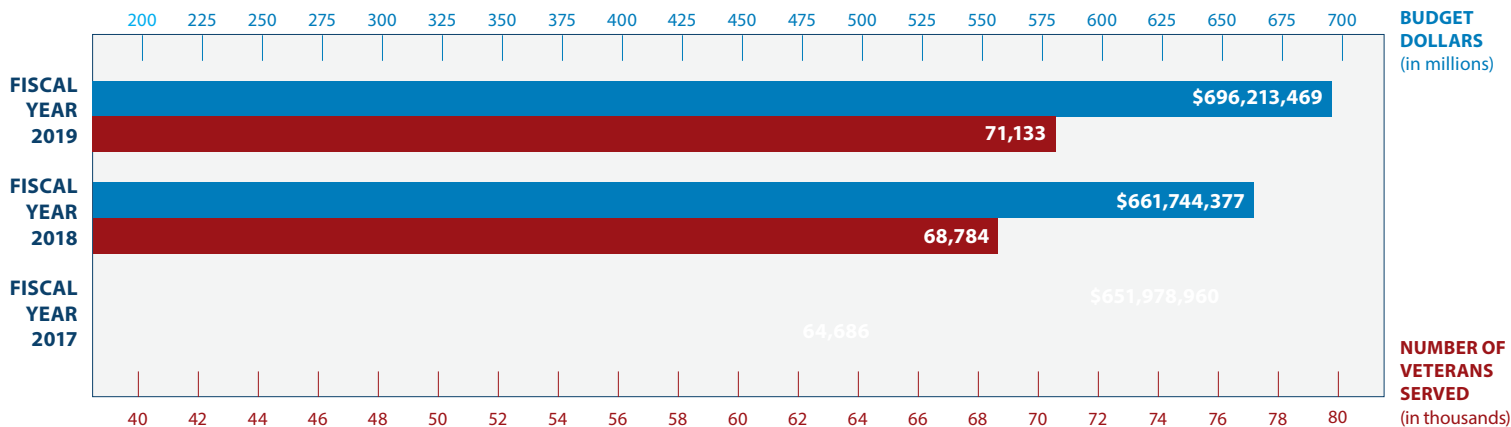
# ABOUT US

The San Francisco VA Health Care System (SFVAHCS) is a comprehensive network that provides highly complex care to Veterans through the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) and six community-based outpatient clinics in Santa Rosa, Eureka, Ukiah, Clearlake, San Bruno and Downtown San Francisco. It has a long history of conducting cutting-edge research, establishing innovative medical programs, and providing compassionate care to Veterans.

SFVAMC has been affiliated with the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), School of Medicine for 60 years. All physicians are jointly recruited by SFVAMC and UCSF School of Medicine. Close to 200 residents and fellows, and 40 allied health professional trainees work at SFVAMC. Annually, more than 700 trainees from 36 clinical training programs rotate through the Medical Center. SFVAMC has many local, regional and national programs including Centers of Excellence in the areas of: Primary Care Education, Epilepsy Treatment, Cardiac Surgery, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, HIV, and Renal Dialysis. It has many other nationally recognized programs including: the Parkinson's Disease Research, Education, and Clinical Center; the Hepatitis C Resource Center; the Mental Illness Research and Education Clinical Center; and VA's National Pacemaker and AICD Surveillance Program. SFVAMC is a nationwide resource in telemedicine supporting VA health care systems in 32 states with 37 different clinical specialties.

SFVAMC has the largest funded research program in the Veterans Health Administration with \$81 million in research expenditures in FY 2019.

# FINANCIAL REPORT AND STATISTICS



## OPERATING EXPENSES

**\$696,213,469**

## ALTERNATIVE REVENUE

MEDICAL CARE COST FUNDS\*

**\$23,842,098**

\* Funds collected by SFVAHCS operations for copayments and health insurance reimbursements which are then returned to the health care system to provide additional services for our Veterans receiving health care.



## PHYSICIANS (FTE)

**246.4**

RNs (FTE)

**505.4**

OTHER (FTE)

**1,894.1**

**2,645.9**

(FTE = Full Time Equivalent)

## EDUCATION



## MEDICAL STUDENTS

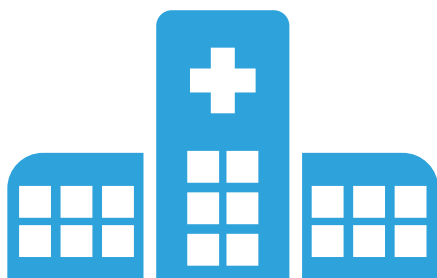
**320**

PHYSICIAN RESIDENTS

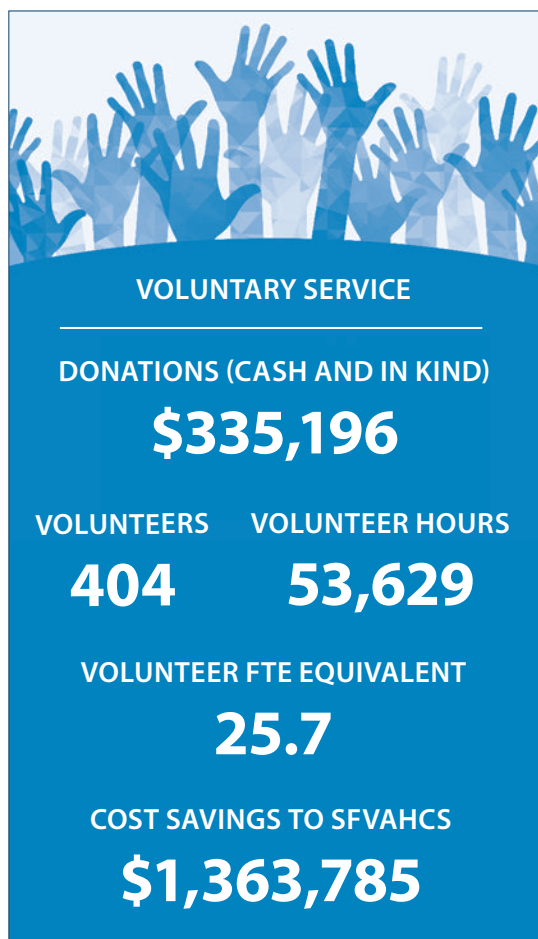
**800**

OTHER CLINICAL TRAINEES

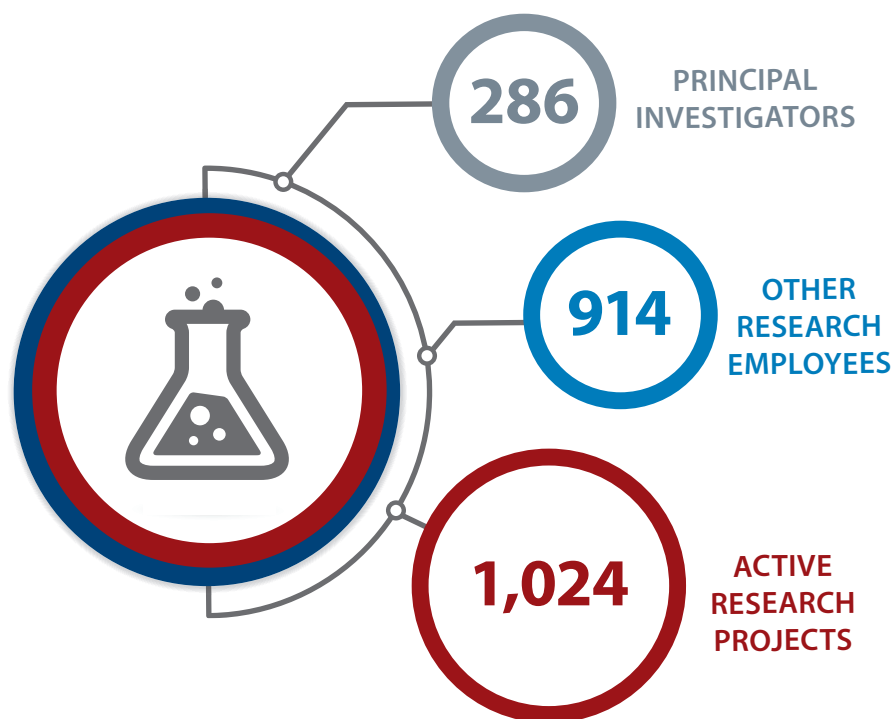
**302**







## RESEARCH EXPENDITURES

**\$81,447,712**

UNIQUE PATIENTS  
**71,133**



WOMEN VETERANS TREATED  
**3,691**

TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS		SFVAMC
<b>669,882</b>		<b>486,687</b>
SANTA ROSA	DOWNTOWN SF	EUREKA
<b>70,482</b>	<b>37,676</b>	<b>29,104</b>
UKIAH	SAN BRUNO	CLEARLAKE
<b>17,035</b>	<b>14,790</b>	<b>14,108</b>

**BEDS (AUTHORIZED)**

HOSPITAL	112
COMMUNITY LIVING CENTER	120

**SURGERIES**

INPATIENT	1,981
OUTPATIENT	1,730



PRESCRIPTIONS FILLED  
**777,129**

# INNOVATION



U.S. ARMY VETERAN CHARLES RAYNER HOLDS 3D-PRINTED MODELS OF HIS LEFT TIBIA. THE MODELS HELPED GUIDE DR. ALEXIS DANG (LEFT) AND HIS BROTHER, DR. ALAN DANG (PICTURED ON OPPOSITE PAGE), PRIOR TO PERFORMING SURGERY ON RAYNER'S LEG.



In 2016, U.S. Army Veteran Charles Rayner slipped at home and broke his left leg. He had surgery on the leg at a non-VA hospital, but the bone healed crooked, causing him pain and making it difficult to walk.

“My leg was so weak, and I was scared to walk,” said Rayner, 68, who needed a walker to get around.

After moving across the country, he went to the local VA facility for treatment. But the facility didn’t have the expertise to handle Rayner’s complicated case, so they referred him to the SFVAMC.

Using high-tech 3D modeling, SFVAHCS orthopedic surgeons, brothers Drs. Alexis and Alan Dang, diagnosed and prepared Rayner for surgery before making a single incision. They made a model of Rayner’s crooked tibia and used it to simulate the surgery, which involved straightening the leg and fitting metal plates.

“Oftentimes, when we go into surgery, we won’t know what we’ll see until we’re in,” said Alexis Dang. “But if we know what we’re going to see, we can make a plan ahead of time.”

“We had the extra confidence to take on his case because we had the technology to do so,” he said.

This is just one example of how 3D modeling has been used to improve Veterans’ care. Originally developed in 2014 as a research tool to educate University of California, San Francisco medical students and residents, the Dangs have used 3D printing and modeling to help Veteran patients better understand surgical procedures and prepare for surgery. This technology takes complex two-dimensional images from three-dimensional data to create an exact replica of the bones that can be held and manipulated. Patients and surgeons use the models to collaboratively map out the best treatment plan.

These 3D-printed models have increased surgical accuracies and improved clinician-centered workflow, reducing the time and cost of surgeries. For example, operating room (OR) team members use the models to better understand the goals in the OR prior to surgery, making the execution of procedures more efficient and safer. The use of 3D models has also dramatically decreased the number of X-rays needed.

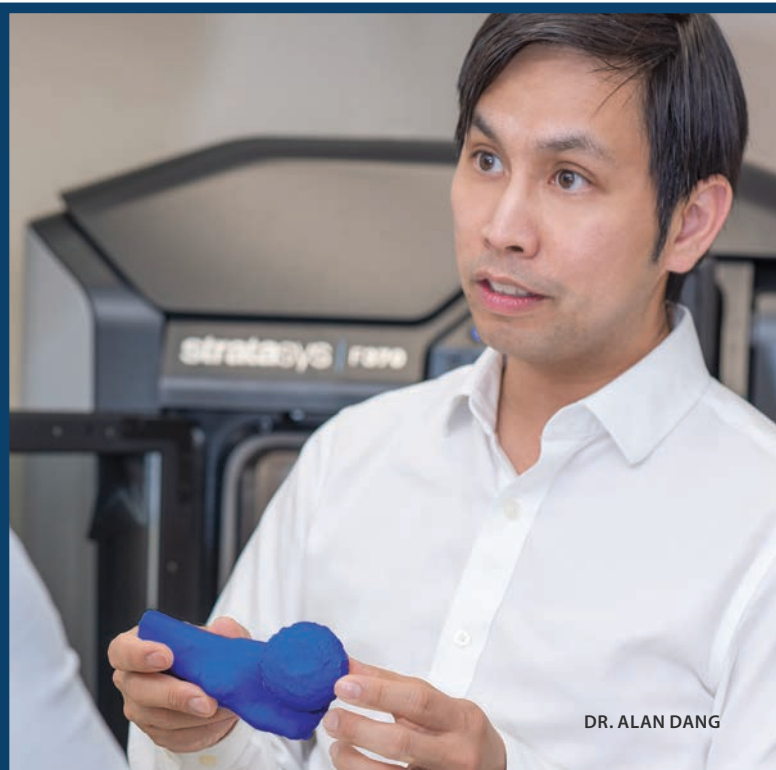
Thanks to the Dangs’ contributions, the SFVAHCS Orthopedic Surgical Division has taken the lead in developing clinical 3D printing, and they now serve as a resource to VISN 21 and VA medical centers across the country.

“It means so much to me to know that I’ll be able to walk again,” said Rayner. “This has been hard on me both physically and mentally, so it will be nice to put this all behind me.”



It means so much to me to know that I’ll be able to walk again.

— CHARLES RAYNER  
U.S. ARMY VETERAN



DR. ALAN DANG

NUMBER OF  
3D MODELS  
PRODUCED

37

AMOUNT SAVED BY  
PRINTING 3D MODELS  
IN HOUSE AT SFVAMC

\$30,000

## TWO RESEARCHERS RECEIVE PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Dr. Michael Shlipak received the Barnwell Award, the highest honor the VA gives to clinical researchers. The award recognized Dr. Shlipak's pioneering research into diagnosing and preventing kidney disease. Among his accomplishments, Dr. Shlipak demonstrated that cystatin C was a better measure of kidney function than the old standard of creatinine. Because of this work, SFVAHCS was an early adopter of cystatin C as a clinical measure. Dr. Shlipak will help the VA roll out this important test nationally.

Dr. Kristine Yaffe was elected to the National Academy of Medicine. As an authority on the epidemiology of cognitive impairment, Dr. Yaffe was one of the first researchers to recognize that in order to understand the epidemiology of dementia, one needed to start with understanding what predicts cognitive impairment and then follow patients over time. Her work opened new areas for research trials to prevent cognitive decline and dementia. In addition, Dr. Yaffe has trained a large number of researchers who are now undertaking many of the subsequent clinical trials.

## SUICIDE RISK AMONG ELDERLY TIED TO ARTHRITIS

Veterans are at increased risk for suicide. Predicting who is at risk for attempting suicide has been very difficult, especially in older

patients. Dr. Amy Byers led a group that found that contrary to many presumptions, the elderly who attempt suicide do not have depression. However, a major risk factor was determined to be chronic arthritic pain.

## RESEARCHERS HELP SET NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH TREATMENTS

Dr. Dolores Shoback was the senior author on The Endocrine Society Clinical Practice Guidelines for treatment of post-menopausal osteoporosis. Dr. Karla Kerlikowske's research continues to inform the guidelines for breast cancer screening by defining who is at risk based upon characteristics that are evident before tumors appear.

## RESEARCH ADDRESSES ISSUES AFFECTING OLDER PATIENTS

Older patients often are prescribed many drugs that they have trouble taking, and that increases the risk of drug-drug interactions causing complications. Dr. Michael Steinman in the Geriatrics Service leads a research program on "deprescribing," to help identify which drugs can or should be stopped. SFVAHCS' geriatrics group has long played a major role in improving decision-making by elderly patients. The group hosts a popular blog on geriatric care (GeriPal) and a frequently used web-based prognosis calculator called "ePrognosis."



**SFVAHCS is fortunate to have internationally renowned researchers whose scientific discoveries have directly improved the clinical care of our nation's Veterans.**

— DR. CARL GRUNFELD  
ASSOCIATE CHIEF OF STAFF FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

RESEARCH  
EXPENDITURES

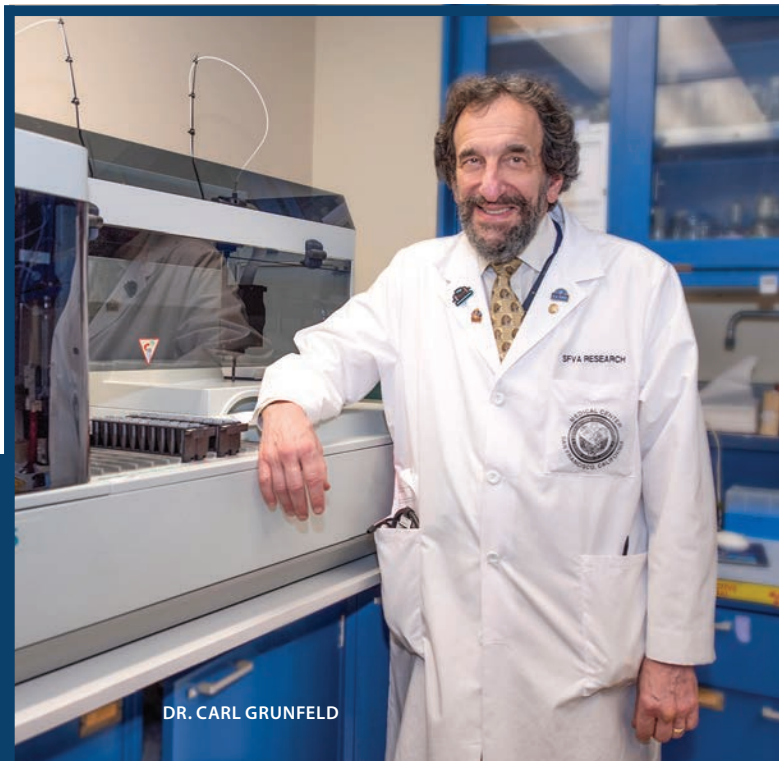
**\$81M**

PRINCIPAL  
INVESTIGATORS

**286**

ACTIVE  
RESEARCH  
PROJECTS

**1,024**



DR. CARL GRUNFELD



When U.S. Air Force Veteran Mostafa Mostafa had a sore throat, the San Francisco resident was ready to make the drive across town to the SFVAMC. Even with no traffic, this trek could take up to 30 minutes each way. He called the Telephone Linked Care line to make an appointment with his primary care doctor and was offered a VA Video Connect (VVC) appointment for the same day. VVC is a model of telehealth care that lets Veterans securely connect with their health care team from just about anywhere by using devices that have an internet connection and a web camera.

Mostafa was skeptical to say the least. “I was curious if they would be able to diagnose me through just a camera on my phone,” he said. “I figured it was worth a shot. I had nothing to lose.”

In five minutes, a doctor was able to examine his throat using the camera on his smartphone, order a strep swab test and prescribe throat lozenges. The virtual visit saved Mostafa a trip to the SFVAMC emergency room and allowed him to receive care when and where he needed it. “The appointment was quick, and I didn’t even have to leave my residence,” he said. “This was so much more convenient.”

SFVAHCS is a leader in telehealth innovation and serves as a resource to VA facilities in 32 different states. This technology

is especially convenient for Veterans from rural areas who live long distances from the medical center and areas where specialty care services can be hard to find.

In addition to VVC, there are several other ways Veterans can take advantage of telehealth services. The Home Telehealth program allows Veterans to participate in remote patient monitoring from the convenience of their home and mobile devices. With equipment located in the home, Veterans can collect and send health data, such as vital signs, directly to VA clinicians located miles away.

Telehealth technologies located at SFVAHCS’ community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) allow appointments with doctors located miles away at the SFVAMC. During a telehealth session at a CBOC, patients meet with a technician who operates the video and medical equipment. Their VA clinician, located at the medical center, talks with the Veteran through a screen, makes diagnoses, and manages his or her care, all using modern technology.

This innovative technology has improved the way SFVAHCS provides patient-centered care and has enhanced access for Veterans.



U.S. ARMY VETERAN EARL WELLS MEETS WITH A VETERAN SUPPORT GROUP USING A TABLET.

”

**The appointment was quick, and I didn’t even have to leave my residence. This was so much more convenient.**

— MOSTAFA MOSTAFA  
U.S. AIR FORCE VETERAN

SPECIALITIES  
OFFERED

**37**

VISITS WITH  
RURAL  
VETERANS

**21,935**

STATES WHERE  
VETERANS RECEIVED  
TELEHEALTH CARE

**32**

# COMPASSION



RED COAT AMBASSADOR GARY CURTAZ GREETES A VISITOR AT THE SFBVAMC. CURTAZ, U.S. NAVY VETERAN, IS ONE OF 12 VOLUNTEER AMBASSADORS AT THE MEDICAL CENTER.



"Good morning! How are you doing today?"

Every day, a corps of energetic volunteers greet visitors with a warm smile and offer assistance to those entering the SFVAMC.

Sporting a distinctive bright red coat, these Red Coat Ambassadors help Veterans find their way to appointments, answer questions, and provide wheelchair or escort assistance when needed. The SFVAHCS' Voluntary Service department launched the Red Coat Ambassador program to create a welcome, friendly experience the minute Veterans and their families and caregivers set foot in the medical center.

"It's all about customer service, welcoming Veterans and providing a friendly face—it's important," said Voluntary Service Assistant Chief Jim McDermott.

Gary Curtaz is one of 12 Red Coat Ambassadors who volunteer their time—up to 40 hours a week—at SFVAMC. He, along with 90 percent of his fellow ambassadors, is also a Veteran and appreciates the opportunity to give back.

"I'm a Vietnam Veteran, so I know what war is like. I know what war does. I know folks need help and assistance and what better way to help than volunteering here and giving back," said Curtaz, who served in the U.S. Navy.

For many Veterans, just seeing a friendly face, or welcoming smile goes a long way to making a visit to the medical center a pleasant experience, said Vietnam Veteran Arthur "Skip" Mellon.

"It's great to be greeted," said Mellon, who served in the U.S. Army Special Forces and has been a patient at SFVAHCS for more than 15 years. "It reflects on the personality of the hospital. I've been to other civilian and VA hospitals, and the Red Coat Ambassadors just make it better here. They are great."

The Red Coat Ambassador Program is a small slice of the robust services provided by SFVAHCS' Voluntary Service department. More than 400 volunteers donate their time to SFVAMC and the six community-based outpatient clinics, performing tasks, such as providing physical and recreational therapy support, performing administrative duties, doing work in our research labs, and transporting Veterans to the SFVAMC. For many volunteers—the majority of whom are retired—working at SFVAHCS facilities gives them a sense of pride and purpose.

"When you can make a difference in people's lives, it's really quite a charge," said Curtaz. "There is nothing better than when Veterans are coming in the door; they recognize you from their last visit and smile."



**I've been to other civilian and VA hospitals, and the Red Coat Ambassadors just make it better here. They are great.**

— ARTHUR "SKIP" MELLON  
U.S. ARMY VETERAN

NUMBER OF  
RED COAT  
AMBASSADORS

**12**

NUMBER OF  
VOLUNTEERS

**404**

SAVINGS  
TO SFVAHCS

**\$1.4M**



RED COAT AMBASSADOR NICK ANDRADE, U.S. ARMY VETERAN (RIGHT), GIVES DIRECTIONS TO U.S. ARMY VETERAN NESTOR TOM.

# PAIN PROGRAM GIVES VETERAN SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

Anthony “Ray” Washington started his mornings like most people. He would open his eyes and stretch, get out of bed, wash up and then prepare for the day ahead. But between 1998 and 2019, this simple morning routine was anything but typical for the U.S. Marine Corps Veteran. In fact, it was a daily nightmare.

“It was hell,” he said. “I had so much chronic pain all over my body, feet, knees, hips, neck, back, wrists and hands that I couldn’t leave my house. I couldn’t even drive because I was in so much pain.”

Washington had accepted a life of pain for many years. In 2019, he was ready to seek help. He spoke to a social worker at the SFVAMC and asked if support was available.

“I was desperate,” he said. “I just wanted the pain to stop. I was willing to try anything.”

Washington’s social worker told him about the Intensive Pain Rehabilitation Program (IPRP) at the SFVAMC. He decided to give it a try.

The IPRP is a 12-week outpatient program for Veterans with chronic pain that merges pain psychology treatments, physical therapy, mindfulness, spiritual support, and education on medications and nutrition. The program teaches pain self-management skills and movement retraining, improves

functioning, increases engagement with valued living, and more. The SFVAMC’s IPRP is among the most comprehensive pain program in the VA system, and the only VA-based program that allows for the admission of Veterans who, in addition to chronic pain, may be struggling with a substance use disorder. After discharge from the program, patients can attend an optional monthly aftercare group to receive support and continue improving their skills.

For Washington, the program reminded him of some of the valuable lessons he learned while in the military: Pay attention to detail and use the mind to overcome pain intensity.

“Chronic pain is real, but dealing with it is mostly mental,” he said. “The program has physical exercise, but there are also mental exercises, which is the key in chronic pain. It’s about altering how you think about pain.”

After completing the program in 2019, Washington was able to return to living his life. Even though Washington continues to deal with pain, the skills he learned in the program have greatly improved his quality of life. He regained the confidence to drive farther distances and has considered running again.

“They gave me my life back,” he said. “I can do things again with my son and significant other. I have the best health care on the planet. Thank you to the IPRP for everything.”



**They gave me my life back.  
I can do things again with my son  
and significant other. I have the best  
health care on the planet. Thank you  
to the IPRP for everything.**

— RAY WASHINGTON  
U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN

VETERANS WHO  
REPORTED  
SATISFACTION  
WITH PROGRAM

**92%**

VETERANS  
WHO COMPLETED  
PROGRAM

**65%**

VETERANS  
WHO REPORTED  
IMPROVED PHYSICAL  
FUNCTIONING

**47%**





# TRANSPORTATION AND LODGING SERVICES MAKE TRIP TO SAN FRANCISCO EASIER FOR RURAL VETERANS

12

The SFVAHCS catchment area stretches from just south of San Francisco to close to the Oregon border. Additionally, Veterans from all over the country choose SFVAHCS for its high-quality care and specialized services. Having reliable transportation and lodging is critically important to patients coming from near and far.

SFVAHCS' Facility Transportation Department fleet of 12 shuttles, three vans and four motor coaches provide free, low-hassle ways for Veterans and their caregivers to access the care they need. In FY2019, the SFVAHCS Transportation Services department provided more than 30 daily runs and transported over 42,000 passengers to the SFVAMC. In response to Veterans' feedback, in 2019, SFVAHCS launched its new Redwood Coast Flyer express bus, which transports Veterans from Eureka to San Francisco. The large, comfortable motor coaches allow Veterans to ride in style and have reduced their travel time by nearly an hour.

"We are the only VA in the United States that uses these motor coaches for our Veterans on a daily basis," said Saul Alvarado, SFVAHCS' facility transportation chief.

Dan Wingington, U.S. Army Veteran, says the new bus makes his 135-mile trek to the SFVAMC much more pleasant.

"I'm really glad to be able to take the bus," said Wingington, of Willits, California. "If I had driven down to SFVAMC, it would have been too expensive and just exhausting."

Getting Veterans to their care is often only half the battle. With San Francisco being one of the nation's top-five most expensive metropolitan areas, an affordable lodging alternative is necessary. SFVAHCS' Hoptel program offers Veterans traveling more than 50 miles to the medical center a convenient, no-cost place to stay while receiving their care. The Hoptel features double-occupancy rooms with either a private or shared bathroom, television, desk space, and lockers to store personal belongings.

"We are extremely thankful to be able to extend our hospitality to our nation's Veterans to coincide with the top-quality medical care offered here at the SFVAMC," said Hoptel Manager Chuck Hughes. "It's an incredible honor that Veterans choose us for their care and are willing to travel to enjoy the relationships and care our VA providers offer."



U.S. ARMY VETERAN ROY BOWERS (LEFT) USES A WHEELCHAIR LIFT TO BOARD AN SFVAHCS SHUTTLE.

”

**I'm really glad to be able to take the bus. If I had driven down to SFVAMC, it would have been too expensive and just exhausting.**

— DAN WINGINGTON  
U.S. ARMY VETERAN

PATIENTS  
TRANSPORTED

**42,357**

MILES  
DRIVEN

**696,100**

COST SAVINGS  
TO VETERANS

**\$750K**

# PARTNERSHIP



MONICA BRIGGS (LEFT), FAMILY MEMBER OF AN SFVAMC VETERAN, PARTICIPATES IN A WHOLE HEALTH TAI CHI CLASS AT THE SFVAMC. THIS CLASS IS OPEN TO VETERAN PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.



# NEW MODEL OF CARE HELPS VETERANS PLAY MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN THEIR HEALTH AND WELLNESS

14

Traditionally, doctors provide medical advice, and patients follow as instructed. SFVAHCS is taking a more collaborative approach with great results. Using a “whole health” approach, health care providers at SFVAHCS empower and partner with their Veteran patients to make important health decisions together that will lead to living a whole, healthy and fulfilling life.

“Our mission is to improve wellness and quality of life by helping Veterans take an active role in setting and achieving their own health goals,” said Integrative Health Service Chief Dr. Karen Seal.

Whole Health integrates conventional medicine with a new, holistic way of providing health care. The goal is to equip patients with preventative and wellness skills that promote the health of the body, mind and soul. Veterans can also work with a health coach to help them access the tools, services and support they need to develop and meet their personal health goals. The Integrative Health Service, in partnership with its community partners, has steered more than 1,000 Veterans to wellness programs, such as yoga and tai chi; integrative health modalities, such as battlefield acupuncture; and integrated clinical care for conditions, such as chronic pain, with great results.

U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Aldo Ramon takes yoga classes, attends spirituality group meetings and receives acupuncture treatments through the VA as part of his Whole Health wellness program.

“These classes put my mind in a nice, calm place and help relieve some of the pain in my back,” said Ramon, who has been receiving care from SFVAHCS for more than 25 years. “I am thankful to the VA for offering these options.”

The Integrative Health and Wellness Clinic provides individualized care through co-located visits with providers from primary care, nutrition, physical therapy, and mental health and joins Integrative Health’s other interdisciplinary clinical offerings, including the Integrated Pain Team Clinic for Veterans with chronic pain, and the Integrated Care Clinic for post-9/11 Veterans. Each of these clinics gives Veterans an opportunity to see providers with different areas of expertise—all working together to better understand and serve Veterans.

The Integrative Health Service is developing ways to bring its programs and services to Veterans in rural areas through telehealth. Whole Health coaches and the Integrated Pain Team staff are already providing services to Veterans through video and telephone visits.

SFVAHCS was selected to become a Whole Health Learning Collaborative for VISN 21. Over the next three years, the Integrative Health Service will receive funding to grow its Whole Health programs and implement culture change throughout the health care system.



**These classes put my mind in a nice, calm place and help relieve some of the pain in my back. I am thankful to the VA for offering these options.**

— ALDO RAMON  
U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN

NUMBER OF WHOLE HEALTH  
AND WELLNESS PROGRAMS  
AVAILABLE TO VETERANS

111

NUMBER OF  
VETERANS SERVED  
BY WHOLE HEALTH

1,595  
1,595

U.S. ARMY VETERAN CHARLES LORD HAS ACUPUNCTURE NEEDLES INSERTED INTO HIS EAR DURING A BATTLEFIELD ACUPUNCTURE GROUP SESSION AT THE SFVAMC.



# HOMELESS PROGRAMS STRIVE TO GET VETERANS OFF STREETS AND INTO STABLE HOUSING

Standing before a crowd filled with other Veterans, government officials, and friends and families at the dedication ceremony for the Colma Veterans Village, Belinda Payne was overcome with emotion.

"I was about to lose my mind out there being a homeless person in America," she said. "It's amazing how you can get back into society and be accepted. Thank you for giving us a second chance."

Fighting back tears, the U.S. Navy Veteran shared her story about struggles with homelessness and expressed gratitude for a new place to finally call her own. Payne was one of the 65 grateful Veterans who moved into the Colma Veterans Village for formerly homeless Veterans in late 2019.

The housing project is a partnership between the SFVAHCS, San Mateo County Department of Housing, the Town of Colma, Mercy Housing California, Brilliant Corners and the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Located just south of San Francisco, Colma Veterans Village is an affordable community that includes 65 units; ample communal outdoor space; community garden; and a wellness center, among other amenities.

The Colma Veterans Village is just one of a number of partnerships between the SFVAHCS and federal, state and local groups that are focused on helping homeless and

at-risk Veterans connect with housing solutions, health care, community employment services and other resources. The efforts of these partnerships have been paying off over the last several years. In 2019, the San Francisco Point in Time Count reported that the Veteran homeless rate in San Francisco decreased 11 percent.

The HUD-VASH Program, which combines U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development housing vouchers with VA health and support services, is one of the most successful partnerships that helps vulnerable homeless Veterans and their families find and sustain permanent housing.

"Supporting Veterans through the HUD-VASH program is important because homelessness creates barriers for Veterans from accessing proper health care, mental health and other social services that the VA can provide," said Jia Son, HUD-VASH program director.

Additionally, the SFVAHCS manages several support programs designed to assist homeless Veterans, including Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Program outreach, contracted residential service programs, grant and per-diem transitional housing programs, and Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams.

SFVAHCS is committed to ending homelessness among Veterans, and programs and partnerships such as these are a great way forward.



**It's amazing how you can get back into society and be accepted. Thank you for giving us a second chance.**

— BELINDA PAYNE  
U.S. NAVY VETERAN  
COLMA VETERANS VILLAGE RESIDENT

VETERANS  
RECEIVED  
HOMELESS  
SERVICES

**1,614**

VETERANS  
UTILIZED  
HUD VASH  
VOUCHERS

**1,566**

HOMELESS  
SERVICES  
BUDGET

**\$19M**



U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN AND COLMA VETERANS VILLAGE RESIDENT JAMES NELSON (CENTER) CUTS THE RIBBON DURING THE DEDICATION CEREMONY ON OCT. 8, 2019.



Military service members have all the makings to be great college students—they're typically disciplined and know how to get the job done. Still, transitioning to an academic environment can be challenging as they adjust to civilian life. Staff members from the SFVAHCS have teamed up with local colleges and universities to help student Veterans as they make their way back to the classroom.

Launched in 2010, and the first VA program of its kind, the Student Veteran Health Program (SVHP) is an innovative outreach program that provides easy access to mental health and social work services to Veterans enrolled at City College of San Francisco, Skyline College, Santa Rosa Junior College, College of the Redwoods, Napa Valley College and San Francisco State University. Licensed therapists are located on-campus and offer Veterans a wide variety of services, including assistance with enrolling into VA health care, scheduling medical appointments, transitioning to civilian life, and providing emotional support and psychological counseling.

"We want to make the VA accessible and responsive to Veterans, so that they will come to us for their health care needs," said Keith Armstrong, SFVAHCS' strategic partnership officer and the founder of the SVHP. "Student Veterans tend to be older, more mature and have less time to dilly-dally, so if we can go to where they are, we break down the barriers to health care."

"By helping Veterans navigate the system, we help demystify the VA," said Bridget Leach, a SFVAHCS social worker who works

with Veterans at City College of San Francisco. "If you give them a positive experience, they are much more likely to come back and talk to you about more serious subjects, such as mental health issues."

U.S. Army Veteran Alex Avila is among the more than 3,800 students who have benefited from the program. During a visit with Leach to discuss his VA educational benefits, Avila ended up enrolling in VA health care and making an appointment with a VA primary care provider.

"The Student Veteran Health Program makes everything so much easier and less stressful. I feel like I'm being cared for," said Avila, who served five years and was deployed to Afghanistan in 2013. He plans to complete his general education courses at City College and then transfer into San Francisco State University's nursing program.

In addition to one-on-one counseling, the program also hosts a speaker series for Veterans on topics, such as managing stress, dealing with pain, and overcoming sleep problems. SVHP staff also give presentations to college faculty and staff to help them learn about the challenges faced by Veterans and how to better support them.

SFVAHCS has plans to continue to grow this program and is currently working with the University of California (UC) Office of the President to expand services to all UC campuses across the state.



U.S. NAVY VETERAN AND SENIOR SOCIAL WORKER MARLO NARRO SPEAKS WITH U.S. AIR FORCE STUDENT VETERAN KYLE PALMER

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**The Student Veteran Health Program makes everything so much easier and less stressful. I feel like I'm being cared for.**

— ALEX AVILA  
U.S. ARMY VETERAN

STUDENT  
VETERANS  
SERVED

505

STUDENT  
VETERANS  
ENROLLED IN  
VA HEALTH CARE

213

EVENTS  
FACILITATED IN  
SUPPORT OF  
STUDENT VETERANS

172

# WORDS FROM

**The San Francisco VA clinic and hospital must be one of the best medical facilities in the country. Their attention to detail is amazing. They treat every Veteran with respect and honor.**

— U.S. NAVY VETERAN

**The dermatology, audiology, sleep clinic, mental health and orthopedics clinics have all been outstanding. They have oftentimes worked in concert to help me improve my health and my quality of life.**

— U.S. COAST GUARD VETERAN

**I've used SFVA for all my health needs since 2001. I've always received the best total care. I enjoy the team approach to monitoring and providing care. Thank you to my team. They are without question the best!**

— U.S. ARMY VETERAN

**The VA has always looked after me ever since I left the service. I hope someday to be able to volunteer at the VA when I have the time. I would like to help new Veterans as they come back to civilian life.**

— U.S. NAVY VETERAN



# OUR VETERANS



**The VA saved my life. They provided me with the very best health care I have ever experienced. I liked the prescription service when I used to order my refills on the telephone. Using My HealtheVet is even better. Thank you!**

— U.S. NAVY VETERAN

**I was recently admitted to the hospital. The staff was so caring and attentive. Very professional, very friendly.**

— U.S. ARMY VETERAN

**The visits to the VA hospital have been a rewarding experience for me. Everyone has been helpful, no matter what department I have been to.**

— U.S. AIR FORCE VETERAN

**I was in pain and afraid. The staff appeared, and I was no longer alone. You have the most dedicated angels on earth. God bless every one of you.**

— U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN

**I was very well treated and learned new things to make my life function better. I actually slept through the night for the first time in many months, thanks to the new wonderful snore guard!**

— U.S. ARMY VETERAN

# SAN FRANCISCO VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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## SAN FRANCISCO VA MEDICAL CENTER

4150 Clement St.  
San Francisco, CA 94121  
415-221-4810

## OUTPATIENT CLINICS

### Clearlake

15145 Lakeshore Dr.  
Clearlake, CA 95422  
707-995-7200

### Eureka

930 W. Harris St.  
Eureka, CA 95503  
707-269-7500

### San Bruno

1001 Sneath Lane, Suite 300  
San Bruno, CA 94066  
650-615-6000

### Downtown San Francisco

401 3rd St.  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
415-281-5100

### Santa Rosa

3841 Brickway Blvd.  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403  
707-569-2300

### Ukiah

630 Kings Court  
Ukiah, CA 95482  
707-468-7700

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

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