

PHILADELPHIA VA MEDICAL CENTER

# Winning Attitude

Heroes Making History



2014 ANNUAL REPORT



## PHILADELPHIA VA MEDICAL CENTER LEADERSHIP



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## Director's Message

The year 2014 was a year of incredible successes, challenges and rebuilding for the Philadelphia VA Medical Center, which served to make us even stronger as an organization. Through the National Access and Data review, The Joint Commission survey, and visits by both the Veterans Affairs Acting Secretary and new Secretary, we continued to evolve as an organization. Putting a priority on listening to the voices of our Veteran patients, we began hosting quarterly town halls to provide a forum for regular feedback. During all these events and challenges, we remained dedicated to our mission of serving the Nation's Veterans.

And we exceeded expectations with the incredible undertaking of hosting the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey in August. It has often been said that sports is a metaphor for life. This is particularly true when talking about disabled athletes. Athletic competition provides an opportunity to train, challenge one's self, and succeed with an increased sense of one's own capability.

The Philadelphia VA Medical Center was proud to host this athletic competition which includes 17-medaled events that require skills that mirror accomplishments achieved at the Medical Center. As you review this annual report, you will see that we have compared our successes in moving the mission forward over the past year to the training and skills demonstrated by these incredible athletes:

- Like the Slalom event, we have overcome obstacles to provide access to the best care for our Veterans.
- As in Archery and Trapshooting, we have maintained a steady hand, and stayed on target to hit the mark in order to improve Wi-Fi connectivity and open the Snyder House.
- We have raced to the finish line in order to work towards eliminating Veteran homelessness and reducing processing time for compensation and pension examinations.
- And we have worked as a team to achieve clinical success and outreach to the community to celebrate The Year of the Veteran in Philadelphia.

Each day we demonstrated how deeply committed we are to providing quality care to the Veterans we are so privileged to serve as we continue to make strides in achieving our strategic goal of transforming our organization. Our staff accomplished great things this year and it is certainly a time to celebrate our winning attitude. As we move into the new year, I am sure we will continue to experience the excitement of achievement and be an organization that *Provides Excellence* to all Veterans.

We sincerely thank our patients and look forward to continuing to provide the best possible care in 2015.

DANIEL D. HENDEE, FACHE  
*Medical Center Director*

# Overcoming Obstacles

The Slalom event requires participants to overcome obstacles presented in their path to complete a task ...





## Access to Care

Since June 2014, the Philadelphia VA Medical Center took numerous steps to reduce wait times and increase access to care for Veterans. Actions included the rollout of a centralized call center to improve communication with Veterans regarding appointments, more emphasis was placed on direct communication with patients on the waiting list, and an organization-wide re-education of staff regarding the complex scheduling package.

Other steps included modifications in non-VA care practices in order to offer more community-based care to Veterans waiting to be seen by a provider, and the expansion of clinic hours at the Medical Center and community based outpatient clinics to meet the scheduling needs of Veterans. In addition, on-going facility renovations allow for increased staffing and clinic capacity.

The PVAMC leadership continues to identify opportunities for improvement and monitors the electronic wait list daily, as well as reviews wait times, scheduling practices, and the clinical status of those patients on the wait list.

## Veterans Choice

In August 2014, the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 directed the establishment of the Veterans Choice Program.

Every Veteran was sent a letter and a Choice Card in the mail with details about the program. Veterans who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility, and Veterans who are currently waiting for an appointment longer than 30 days from their preferred date or the date determined to be medically necessary by their physician, will have the option to use their Choice Card to receive care from a community provider.

The Medical Center continues to implement this three-year program which is aimed at improving access and meeting the challenge of the short-term health care needs of Veterans.

## Audiology Van in Gloucester

There's a new van in town at the Gloucester Community Based Outpatient Clinic to ensure Veterans are getting their audiology needs met in a timely manner. The OnSite Health van is stationed at the clinic and provides non-VA audiology care for eligible Veterans who live in the area.

The initiative has been integral to reducing the audiology backlog at the Philadelphia VA Medical Center, with clinicians seeing up to eight patients each day. The collaboration between the PVAMC, Gloucester County, and the OnSite Health Van will continue into 2015 to ensure continuation of access for our Veterans.

Veterans have expressed their satisfaction with this new program, and are happy to receive their care closer to home. Since the program's inception, 363 Veterans have been seen for audiology services in the OnSite van.



# Hitting The Target

Sports like Archery and Trap Shooting require a steady hand to stay on target and hit the mark ...





## VA National Wi-Fi Initiative

In June of 2014, the Facility Information Technology Service (FITS) began to implement the national, secure business wireless data network infrastructure across the PVAMC facility. As a result, the Medical Center now has a world-class security industry standard computer wireless (Wi-Fi) for all clinical and administrative spaces.

This technology has enabled more flexible capabilities for accessing medical electronic information systems, including video, voice, and data. In addition, staff is now able to perform wireless transfers of information amongst medical devices such as vital signs monitors and infusion pumps, thereby improving timely access to medical data.

This VA National Wi-Fi rollout has also paved the way for future initiatives such as the Real Time Locator System (RTLs). The system is a real benefit for patient care. It is available for use on government issued equipment by Medical Center personnel.

## Clinic Successes

2014 saw a number of significant innovations and improvements in the clinical operations at the Philadelphia VA Medical Center.

One example was the development of the Interdisciplinary Pain Rehabilitation Program (IPRP), a tertiary treatment program for Veterans who have already engaged with self-management programs at a less intensive level (e.g., Pain School, movement programs like physical therapy, Yoga, MOVE Weight Management Program) and would benefit from a more integrated, systematic approach to relearning how to live with chronic pain.

Primary Care expanded the availability of new patient appointments and added an onsite provider in the Opioid Treatment Program. Cardiology worked to improve the timeliness of review of all Electrocardiograms (EKGs) read in the facility. Gastroenterology had significant reductions in wait times and improved efficiency in endoscopy. Behavioral Health added providers to meet the mental health needs of returning Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom(OEF/OIF) Veterans.

## Opening Snyder House

In July 2014, the Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (RRTP) facility, located in downtown Philadelphia on Snyder Avenue, opened its doors to Veterans. The PVAMC was chosen as one of the expansion sites for the program and staff members worked diligently to implement the program and provide services to qualified Veterans.

Known locally as the “Snyder House,” the mission is to provide state-of-the-art, high-quality residential rehabilitation and treatment services for Veterans with co-occurring medical conditions, mental illness, addiction, and/or psychosocial deficits.

Onsite resident staff includes clinicians, administrative and support personnel. The 40-bed, home-like environment welcomes Veterans in a safe and secure environment.



# Racing To The Goal

Track and Handcycling require concentration and speed to be first over the finish line ...





## 25 Cities Initiative to End Veteran Homelessness

In March 2014, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched the “25 Cities Initiative” to assist communities with high concentrations of homeless Veterans to find housing and reduce homelessness. Philadelphia was one of the chosen cities.

This initiative is a joint effort by VA, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and local community partners to support the 25 communities with resources, guidance, and lessons learned to enhance their existing local homeless programs. Through this initiative, the PVAMC and its federal and local partners are identifying all of the known homeless Veterans, and working to find them permanent housing solutions.

Since the 25 Cities program was launched, a total of 450 Veterans, nearly half of whom were previously considered chronically homeless, have been housed. In 2014, the point-in-time count of the homeless indicated 357 homeless Veterans in Philadelphia, which was down from the 2013 count of 440.

## Million Veteran Program

The Million Veteran Program (MVP) is a trailblazing VA effort to consolidate genetic, military exposure, health, and lifestyle information from a million Veterans, in a single database. The program is an important partnership between VA and Veterans to learn more about how genes affect health, in order to improve health care for all Veterans.

The database will be used to conduct health and wellness studies to determine which genetic variations are associated with particular health and wellness issues. By identifying gene-health connections, the program could advance disease screening, diagnosis, and prognosis to point the way toward more effective, personalized therapies.

Screening, diagnosis, and treatment for some illnesses, such as some forms of cancer, have already been improved through knowledge about the effects of certain genes. MVP will lead to new knowledge about which genes put people at risk for certain diseases, and which ones affect how people respond to treatment.

## Compensation and Pension

Although the major work on a VA claim for disability compensation is processed at the VBA Regional Office, the Medical Center plays an important role in some cases: performing examinations when necessary to fully evaluate a claim.

As a result of a VBA targeted initiative aimed at reducing the claims backlog, VHA saw a surge in the number of claims requiring examinations. The number of weekly requests doubled in 2014, to approximately 600 requests per week. And the claims are more complicated, frequently requiring evaluation of four or more conditions, frequently by specialists.

Working diligently, with close monitoring and adjustment of staffing to address workload and quality, the average processing time over the past year for compensation and pension examinations was 16 days, with the quality benchmark score of 95 percent. Steps to reduce this processing time included a daily review of provider capacity and utilization, flexible use of fee basis providers, and closer inter-departmental communication and cooperation.



# Team Work

Team sports like Basketball and Softball require team members to work together toward a common goal ...





## Year of the Veteran

Philadelphia City Council declared 2014 “The Year of the Veteran” to “highlight and celebrate the accomplishments” of Veterans and to raise public awareness of issues important to Veterans. PVAMC was delighted to partner with a variety of community organizations to truly celebrate this wonderful recognition of Veterans.

Among the events highlighted in the Resolution was the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, hosted for the first time in its 34-year history, by the Philadelphia VA Medical Center. Other “Year of the Veteran” activities included the selection of *The Yellow Birds* by Veteran Kevin Powers as Philadelphia Free Library’s One Book selection for 2014. It told the powerful story of one Veteran’s experience in Iraq, and PVAMC participated in a number of the events scheduled around the One Book program.

City Council’s Resolution provided a great opportunity for PVAMC to outreach with other organizations in the region and bring health care to more of the area’s Veterans.

## The Joint Commission

In 2014, the PVAMC became fully-reaccredited by The Joint Commission, which is nationally recognized as a symbol of quality that reflects an organization’s commitment to meeting certain performance standards.

In July, the Commission surveyed the Medical Facility, Home Care, Nursing Care Centers and Behavioral Health programs. In addition, the Opioid Treatment Program had a separate two-day survey in July. The PVAMC was awarded full accreditation for both surveys.

The overall results of The Joint Commission survey revealed that PVAMC was performing at an exceptional level and demonstrated an overall compliance of 98.45 percent with all established Joint Commission standards. The surveyors were complimentary of services and care that they observed as they conducted the survey and shared their good news with staff.

In addition to the surveys, The Joint Commission conducted a Focused Survey in October, which was requested by the Veterans Health Administration to evaluate nationally identified concerns related to patient wait times, access to care, and other issues related to health care quality and patient safety.

The PVAMC did well, and as in the earlier surveys, action plans were created to ensure all corrective actions were developed and implemented.

## VA Leadership Visits PVAMC

In 2014, Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald and Acting Secretary Sloan Gibson both placed the Philadelphia VA Medical Center on their calendars, with visits occurring in June and September.

During their visits they toured the Medical Center, met with staff, area Veteran Service Organization representatives, and other various stakeholders. The facility also conducted a media conference for local outlets which provided the Secretary and Acting Secretary an opportunity to address national and local issues with leadership.

During Secretary McDonald’s visit (below), he shared that he wanted to foster a culture of transparency at the Department of Veterans Affairs. He also recognized the facility and its staff for the strides that had been made in reducing the backlog, noting that in just a few months, the hospital had reached out to 1,600 Veterans to get them off waiting lists.



# Spirit of a Winner!



## NVWG Athlete: Gabriel Diaz de Leon

One of the most exciting moments at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) is the announcement of the recipient of the “Spirit of the Games” award. Unlike the rest of the week’s competitions, this winner is selected by the Veterans themselves, in a secret ballot vote.

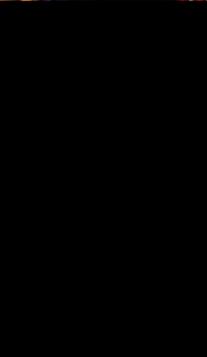
This year’s winner, Gabriel Diaz de Leon, selected by his peers, is a proud example of the culmination of care received through the VA health care system. Physicians, nurses, rehab

therapists, prosthetics staff, transportation coordinators, imaging technicians, clinic clerks, and everyone else in the Medical Center, contributed to his care, enabling him to reach this great moment. The teamwork and winning attitude displayed by the VA staff makes it possible for all the competitors to be victorious.





# Racing To The Goal



# Team Work



# Overcoming Obstacles



# Hitting The Target

# Philly Phever Athletes





For the 14 members of the Philly Phever team, bringing the 34th annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) to Philadelphia was a proud moment. For many, it was the first time their families would see them compete. For some, unable to travel long distances due to their disability, it was their first Games, excited by the opportunity that the hometown Games provided. But for all, the Philadelphia Games presented an opportunity that none wanted to miss.

All the athletes of the Games have two things in common - they served their country, and as a result of injury or illness, they now use a wheelchair as their primary means of mobility. Some were athletes and competitors in their youth, and some had never participated in athletic competition before. The VA supports the NVWG, and other special events programs, because of the rehabilitative effect that participation has on the participants. But the positive results are so much more than physical.

There are the friendships that come from training together and traveling to the Games together. Sonny Wimberly and Bruce Husted have a close friendship that has extended to their wives. When Wimberly wanted to try Handcycling, Husted's main sport, and Husted wanted to try Trapshooting, Wimberly's main sport, they agreed to work together and teach each other their sport. It didn't matter that they might compete against each other. They supported each other and trained together so each could be at the top of their skills for the competition.

There is the pride of being a spokesperson for an event that is so much bigger than one's self. The Games presented many opportunities to speak publicly in the media about overcoming daily challenges and becoming a person that can accomplish something great - someone who is not held back by their disability. For Sean Johnson, representing his fellow Veterans and encouraging others to never give up, helped him to grow as a man, and know that he could go on and accomplish great things.

There is the example that a father sets for his children - that you can do anything you set your mind to, no matter the obstacles to be overcome. Billy Ray Pearce was competing for the first time and his wife and four

children were ubiquitous throughout the Games in their matching shirts. No one cheered louder at the swimming venue than the Pearce family when Billy Ray was in the water.

And there is the opportunity to use the Games to showcase your skills and move to a higher level of competition. For athletes Laura Schwanger and Mason Symons, the Games are training for competition on a world stage - the Paralympics. Schwanger is a four-time Paralympian and has the medals to prove it. She's retired from world competition now, but never misses the NVWG. Symons competes on the wheelchair rugby national team and is working toward the 2016 Paralympics in Rio.

The Games are full of moments that change lives forever. For the Philly Phever team members, hosting the Games in their hometown was an experience they will never forget. As Doris Merrill, the oldest competitor, at age 91, says, "I'll keep coming back year after year. I look forward to seeing my friends and being a part of this great event."



# Sports Rehabilitation





The National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) provides an invaluable opportunity for Veteran athletes. Co-hosted annually by Veterans Affairs and the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the event provides an opportunity for athletes to instantly gain exposure and hands-on experience with wheelchair sports in an environment that is both highly competitive and educational.

The mix of novice athletes, returning competitors, VA staff, and sports officials and experts provides an exceptional network of resources, support, and sports and rehabilitation experience. These relationships and resources empower the athletes to take sports into their everyday lives and communities ~ whether that is joining a team, going to a sports club, or simply playing a basketball game with a family member. Building these skills is a critical step in the rehabilitative process. This type of rehabilitation that builds confidence and independence does not always happen in the hospital setting, but instead in the “real world.”

The focus of the NVWG is to make sports and activity a part of each Veteran’s lifestyle all year. Connecting Veterans to VA sports programs, community organizations, and other local resources can continue this positive forward momentum into wellness.

And athletes cite numerous benefits. Certainly, there are a multitude of physical health outcomes, but there are other secondary benefits that enrich their lives: rediscovering the ability to engage in sports competitively, finding the confidence to leave their homes and socialize in their communities, reconnecting with family and friends, and finding new peer groups.

The NVWG truly empowers participants with a sense of ability, and in most cases, challenges our Veterans to see what they can do next!



# Medical Support





In August 2014, the 34th National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) provided the PVAMC with a wonderful opportunity to champion the spirit and determination of talented Veterans nationwide. One area of support came from the Medical Team, consisting of PVAMC staff, the NVWG medical director, and a group of VA Sports Medicine physicians.

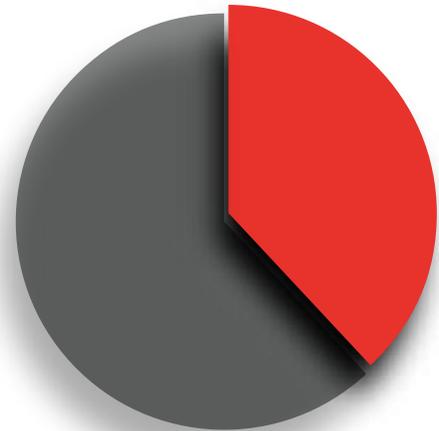
Transporting their talents from the clinical setting of the Medical Center to the Games environment, the Medical Team successfully provided services to nine different venues - from a Gun Club in Southern New Jersey to the streets of downtown Philadelphia.

The overwhelming success of the Medical Team was due to the tireless efforts of these dedicated VA clinicians. Coordinating the experience were six team leaders and their selected team members. The Staffing Team organized a dedicated group of VA Nurses from a number of VA Medical Centers who covered 124 shifts during the week, along with 50 community clinical staff volunteers. These volunteers consisted of nurses, emergency medical technicians, nursing students and resident physicians.

The Water Team recruited 175 VA and community volunteers who distributed 10,000 pounds of ice and 15,000 bottles of water to keep the athletes and volunteers cool and hydrated.

In addition, the Classification Team ensured proper support for athlete classification, an integral part of ensuring that an athlete was competing at their optimal level. The Durable Medical Equipment (DME) Team developed a new system for cleaning, distribution and installation of supportive equipment at the hotel. It also provided wheelchair repairs at all nine venues with extreme efficiency in responding to wheelchair repairs and equipment needs.

Lastly, the Supply Team organized supplies and protocols to ensure the Medical Team could provide seamless and timely care to the Veterans competing during the week.



**Total Medical Support Team Members: 131**

- Community clinical staff volunteers **50**
- VA Nursing Staff **81** (Worked 124 shifts)

**Durable Medical Equipment (DME)**

- **250** pieces of DME distributed in the hotel
- **150** Wheelchair repairs throughout the week



# Community Relations and Volunteers





From the earliest planning stages, Community Relations, including fundraising and recruitment of over 2,500 volunteers, was key to the success of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The Philadelphia region is home to some of the most dedicated sports fans in the Nation. Who else would boo Santa Claus? Accordingly, the decision was made to position the Wheelchair Games as a sporting event, and to attract community support for the athletes of the Games.

Once the word got out that a “Veterans Olympics” was coming to Philadelphia and southern New Jersey, community support followed. From volunteers helping with transportation at the airport to all the sporting events at the Pennsylvania Convention Center and off-site venues in New Jersey and everything in between, volunteers from 28 states served the Games in a memorable and encouraging way.

“The determination of the athletes was incredibly inspiring,” said volunteer Linda Dubell. “Watching them compete in the Slalom, (which was a brutally difficult course), seeing them struggle, but never seeing a single athlete even consider giving up ... there are no words to describe their exceeding strength and courage. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to witness heroes in action! It’s something I’ll never forget.”

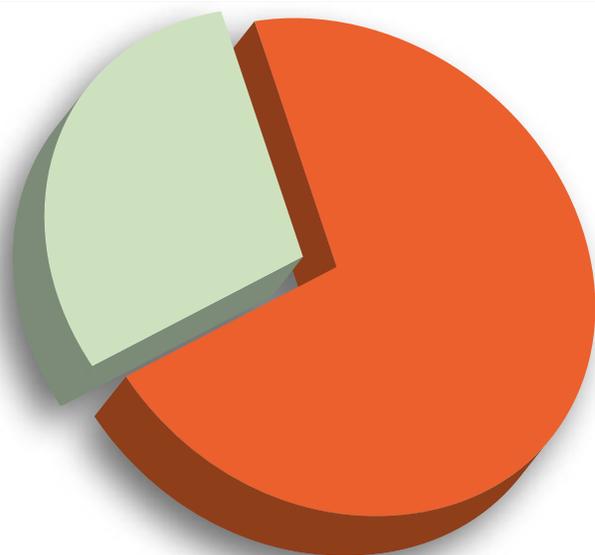
In addition to volunteer support, financial support from the community was also crucial for the success of the Games. From donated water and sunscreen to different financial sponsorship levels, the business community supported the Games with donations of money and goods, including ads on SEPTA buses, and donations of hats, towels and Gatorade by Philadelphia’s professional sports teams - the Eagles and Phillies. Area businesses and other organizations from across the community, responded with open hearts when asked to support the event.

The Games raised awareness of the presence of the VA Medical Center, located in a quiet corner in West Philadelphia. One of the lasting effects is that the community knows the VA is providing excellent health care to the region’s Heroes each and every day.

### Fast facts:

- States represented by Volunteers: **28**
- New Jersey Volunteers: **27% of total volunteers**
- Pre-Game Volunteer Hours: **750**
- Total number of Volunteer Shifts covered: **Approximately 4,400**
- Total number of Organizations and Teams: **165**
- Total Games Volunteer hours: **21,376**
- Top 3 assignments with the most volunteer hours:
  - Transportation: **2,381 hours**
  - Air Guns: **1,491 hours**
  - Bowling: **1,268 hours**

**Total volunteers: 2,523**



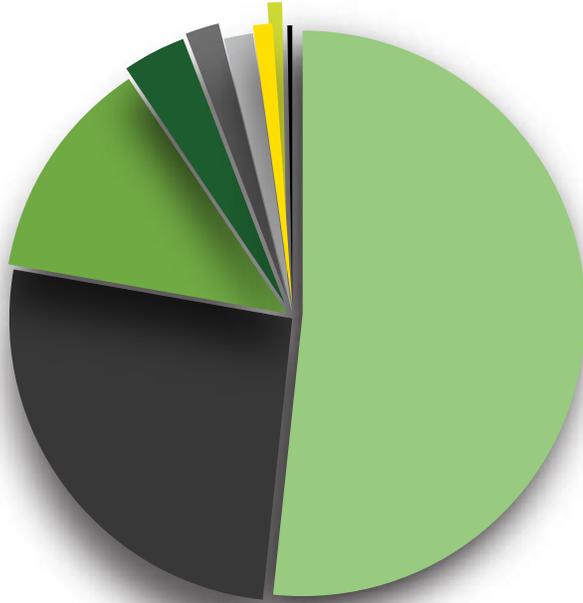
Monetary Donations: **\$95,297**

Gift-in-Kind Donations: **\$227,414**

**Total: \$322,711**

**STATS/DATA**

**FY 2014 Allocation Information**



**2014 Annual Budget: \$503,297,000**

- Personnel Services \$260,484,000
- Travel & Transportation \$5,770,000
- Land & Structures \$5,112,000
- Equipment & Interior Design \$18,829,000
- Supplies & Materials \$63,545,000
- Contractual Services \$131,858,000
- Rent & Utilities \$7,984,000
- Grants, Subsidies, Contributions \$9,797,000
- Other
  - Transport of things \$49,000
  - Insurance Claims \$67,000

**Fee Basis**

**5.12%**

Decrease

FY 14 - \$40,006,298  
FY 13 - \$42,164,472

**Collections**

**7.02%**

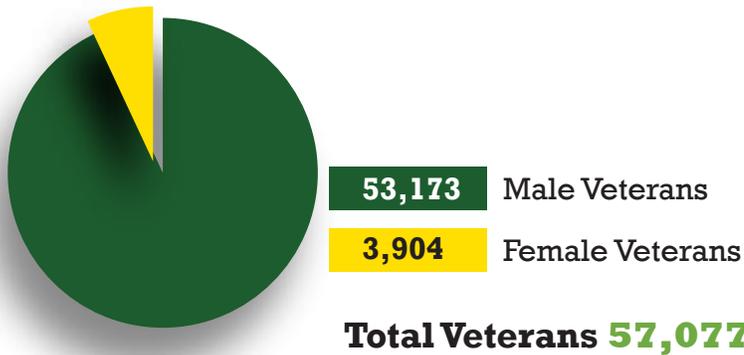
Increase

FY 14 - \$22,177,963  
FY 13 - \$20,621,931

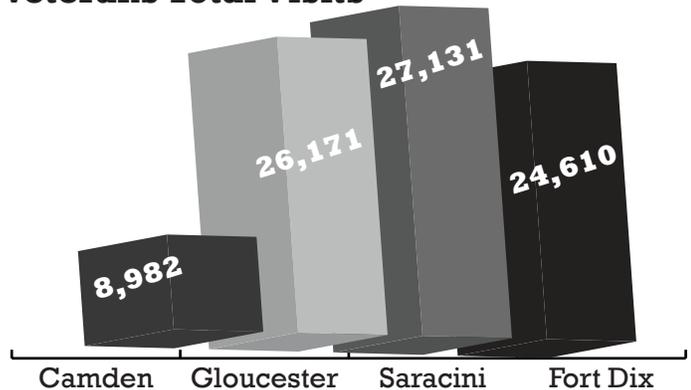
**2,589**

**Employees**

**Number of Veterans Served**



**Community Based Outpatient Clinics Veterans Total Visits**



Number of Medical Center Visits **557,151** . Inpatient Admissions **6,335**



## Accreditations

- **The Joint Commission (TJC)** conducted an unannounced triennial visit to survey the Hospital, Home Care, Long Term Care, Psychosocial Rehabilitative Recovery Center (PRRC), Compensated Work Therapy (CWT), HUD-VASH, HCHV, Grant Per Diem (GPD), and Mental Health Intensive Case Management (MHICM) in July 2014 with Philadelphia VAMC receiving a three year accreditation through July 2017. TJC conducted an unannounced survey in July 2014 of the Opioid Treatment Center which received a three year accreditation through July 2017.
- **Long Term Care Institute** surveyed the Community Living Center in May 2014 and accredited it through February 2015.
- **Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF):** *For Medical Rehabilitation-Comprehensive Integrated Inpatient Rehab Program (CIIRP) and Amputee Program - Polytrauma/Amputation Network Site (PANS)* accredited October 2014 through October 2017. *For Employment and Community Services-Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV), HUD-VASH, and Grant & Per Diem,* accredited October 2014 through October 2017. *For Behavioral Health- Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) - BH Community Integration Standards VEC (Veterans Empowerment Center* accredited through September 2016.
- **The Joint Commission/VHA Focused Reviews related to Access and Coordination of Care:** The Joint Commission surveyed the organization October 7-8, 2015.
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration** surveyed the Opioid Treatment Program in August 2014 which received accreditation until August 2019.
- **Commission on Cancer** granted three year accreditation in June 2014; accredited through October 2017.
- **American Psychological Association:** Accredited Behavioral Health through 2017.
- **College of American Pathologists:** Accredited Pathology and Laboratory Service through November 2017.
- **American Society of Health-System Pharmacists:** Accredited Pharmacy through September 2016.
- **American College of Radiology:** Accredited Mammography Program through January 2016.
- **American Association of Blood Bank:** Accredited Blood Bank through August 2019.
- **American College of Radiation Oncology:** Surveyed Radiation Oncology in October 2014 and accredited through October 2017.
- **American Academy of Sleep Medicine:** The VISN 4 Eastern Region Sleep Center was surveyed in August 2014 and was re-accredited through 2020.
- **The Association of Accreditation for Human Research Protection Programs** accredited Research through July 2015.
- **Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care** accredited Research through May 2016.

# PHILADELPHIA VA MEDICAL CENTER

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800-949-1001 or 215-823-5800

Ft. Dix Outpatient Clinic  
8th & Alabama  
Joint Base McGuire-Dix, NJ 08640  
609-562-2999

Gloucester County VA Outpatient Clinic  
211 County House Road  
Sewell, NJ 08080-2525  
877-823-5230

VA Outpatient Clinic Annex  
300 Broadway, Suite 103  
Camden, NJ 08104  
877-232-5240

Victor J. Saracini VA Outpatient Clinic  
433 Caredean Dr.  
Horsham, PA 19044  
215-823-6050

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