Caring for Veterans through VA’s top priorities
It has been a very busy and exciting year at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System. We improved access for Veterans by continuing to activate services at the new Veterans medical center in New Orleans, and we strengthened our workforce by hiring over 700 new employees this calendar year.

This year, Secretary Shulkin set five priorities for VA to focus our attention and resources. These include greater choice for Veterans, modernizing our system, focusing resources more efficiently, improving timeliness of services, and suicide prevention. Throughout the pages of this annual report, you will find more information about how we are meeting these challenges to meet the health care needs of our Veterans through our four statutory missions of health care, education, research and emergency response.

With community-based outpatient clinics in Baton Rouge, Bogalusa, Franklin, Hammond, Houma, Slidell and St. John Parish, as well as the new Veterans medical center, we delivered 577,388 outpatient appointments to our Veterans in fiscal year 2017, which is an increase of roughly 50,000 more appointments than two years ago, while continuing to increase our patient population so they too can access health care specifically tailored for their needs.

In pursuit of our goal to provide the best health care possible for southeast Louisiana's Veterans, we brought nearly all our services online at the new Veterans medical center in New Orleans. For example, we activated 10 floors of outpatient care, established services for emergency care, low acuity surgical care, intensive care, acute psychiatric care and general medicine inpatient care. Throughout this time, we strengthened our patient safety program, earning the highest patient safety award in VHA - the Gold RCA Cornerstone Award.

As a medical center surrounded by nationally ranked education institutions, we continued to strengthen our academic partnerships with Louisiana State University and Tulane University Medical schools to help us provide excellent primary, specialty and mental health services to our Veterans. During the 2017-2018 academic year, we will have 500 medical students rotating through our health care system. Additionally, our ongoing relationships with University of New Orleans, Dillard University, Xavier University of Louisiana, Delgado Community College, Tulane University Graduate Program in health administration and Loyola University also contributed to the recruitment and growth of our staff of quality allied health and administrative professionals.

As an organization, we are growing engaging teams who have self-identified in our annual all employee survey that SLVHCS is a great place to work because we care about work satisfaction and work/family balance. Caring for our fellow employees is the foundation to a positive, engaged work-life that in turn creates better health care outcomes for our Veterans. 2017 is the highest we’ve seen remarks in these areas after a three-year positive trend. That positive work experience led to more engaged employees committed to providing positive experiences for Veterans while safely and efficiently working to meet their needs – one of the reasons we became a four-star facility in the SAIL model by the end of the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2017.

Our research program continues to grow as well, with 24 researchers, 50 open protocols and $2 million in funding. Our new research building is scheduled to open in early 2018, so we anticipate even more growth in clinical trial research to provide Veterans with immediate access to emerging treatment options.

We were fortunate during this year’s hurricane season our team stood ready to support areas devastated by hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, to include deployment of staff and donations to areas needing additional assistance throughout the recovery process. Our state-of-the-art facility lends itself to disaster-readiness. The new facility has been recognized in national publications for having strong resiliency factors, including the ability to withstand 130 mph winds and support 1,000 people for five days after the loss of city electricity and water.

We are grateful for our many visitors this year who have taken an interest in the care we provide to our Veterans, including five national Veteran service organization commanders or equivalent, international visitors and many state and local partners. We’ve also been featured in national publications, such as The Wall Street Journal, DAV Magazine, Building Operation Management, and our local news outlets.

This year was a milestone year for SLVHCS. We look forward to focusing our efforts on Veterans with even more vigor as the new Veterans medical center becomes fully operational in the coming months.

Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE
CEO/Director,
Southeast Louisiana Veterans HCS
Our patients

Female Veterans served

- FY14: 3,330
- FY15: 3,602
- FY16: 3,877
- FY17: 4,039

Total Veterans served

- FY14: 40,412
- FY15: 41,979
- FY16: 43,149
- FY17: 43,151

Voluntary Service

- FY16: $147,369 In-Kind
- FY16: $10,882 Monetary
- FY16: $158,251 Total

- FY17: Volunteer hours: 20,642.25
- FY17: Donations: 12,719
Three ways we deliver care

- **Telehealth users**
  - FY16: 7,423
  - FY17: 7,936

- **Face-to-face medical appointments**
  - FY14: 510,171
  - FY15: 535,172
  - FY16: 553,821
  - FY17: 577,388

- **Purchased care in the community**
  - FY14: $85,216,532
  - FY15: $92,244,739
  - FY16: $93,248,719
  - FY17: $96,304,543

**Social media growth**

In terms of followers, our Twitter page is 16th in the nation (out of 90 total pages) and our Facebook page is 10th in the nation (out of 142 total pages).
We empower Veterans through transparency of information.

- In the heart of the medical center, we opened a Veterans Service Center, where Veterans can make appointments with subject matter experts in disability claims, appeals, vocational rehab, benefits and legal services. These services are provided by the Veterans Benefits Administration Regional Office, who also offers services at each of our outpatient clinics; Veteran Medical Legal Clinic; American Legion; AMVETS; Catholic War Veterans and Military Order of the Purple Heart.
- The new Veterans medical center has been featured in national publications, such as The Wall Street Journal, DAV Magazine, Building Operation Management, as well as our local news outlets.
- Through events such as town hall meetings, Veterans Day activities, Salute to the Flag, POW/MIA observance, Ladies Night, VSO meetings and much more, Veterans are invited to participate in their health care and get to know their medical center.
- To further foster communications with Veterans, monthly Veterans town halls are held throughout the SLVHCS catchment area to support our Veterans’ needs. These meetings are not only communicated to our Veterans through direct mail, but also social media, where thousands of followers receive daily updates on their VA medical center and activities.
The new Veterans medical center includes some of the most patient friendly features within VA. Each single bed inpatient room has floor-to-ceiling windows, allowing abundant natural light and unrestricted views. For wheelchair patients, restrooms are located at least every 100 yards within the facility and the furniture is selected for comfort and usability for those with mobility impairments and disabilities. The medical center also features covered parking, abundant help desks and track systems in each patient room to carry Veterans between their bed to the restroom without needing to be lifted by a nurse or attendant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Activation Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5D Inpatient MH</td>
<td>7/14/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endoscopy #1</td>
<td>8/14/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endoscopy #2</td>
<td>8/14/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventional Pain</td>
<td>8/17/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endoscopy #4</td>
<td>8/31/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cystoscopy</td>
<td>8/31/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endoscopy #3</td>
<td>9/13/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgent Care - 24/7</td>
<td>9/18/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B Inpatient Medicine Unit</td>
<td>9/19/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3C Medicine Intensive Care Unit</td>
<td>9/19/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-Call Rooms</td>
<td>9/19/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Lounge</td>
<td>9/19/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telemetry</td>
<td>9/19/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR - Outpatient Procedures</td>
<td>9/20/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radiology Procedure - 2F</td>
<td>9/18/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Medicine - SPECT CT</td>
<td>10/16/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Medicine - SPECT</td>
<td>10/16/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiac Rehabilitation</td>
<td>11/6/2017</td>
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<td>CLC - Cypress House</td>
<td>11/20/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiopulmonary Exercise Testing</td>
<td>12/9/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Medicine - Cardiac SPECT #1</td>
<td>12/13/2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New clinical programs and spaces opened in 2017

- Emergency, Surgery, Intensive Care, Psychiatry, Medicine opened in 2017
- 10 floors of outpatient clinics activated by Feb 2017
- 100% administrative services moved by Jan 2017
- 1,000 employees moved; 900 employees hired
- 40,000 pieces of equipment installed
- 28,000 pieces of furniture installed
- 1M+ square feet activated
- 96 beds authorized
- 2,000+ bed days of care
- $8M+ of care returned to in house services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Activation Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Medicine - Cardiac SPECT #2</td>
<td>12/13/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEE</td>
<td>12/15/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inpatient Dialysis</td>
<td>12/18/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency Dept - 24/7</td>
<td>12/21/2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nuclear Medicine - PET CT</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>3B Inpatient Surgery Unit</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>3C Surgery Intensive Care Unit</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bronchoscopy Room</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
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<td>EP Lab*</td>
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<td>EUS Complex</td>
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<td>ERCP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interventional Radiology #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interventional Radiology #2</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cath Lab #1</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cath Lab #2</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hybrid OR</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2D Observation Unit</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Veterans medical center

Vietnam Veterans of America national president John Rowan Vice-president Marsha Four, Treasurer, Dr. Wayne Reynolds, National Secretary Bill Meeks, and Executive Director of Governmental Affairs Rick Weidman take a close look at the work we are doing for Veterans.

Secretary David Shulkin visit

DAV out going executive director and other senior officers are visiting Prosthetics Service at the new Veterans medical center

Vietnam Veterans of America national president John Rowan Vice-president Marsha Four, Treasurer, Dr. Wayne Reynolds, National Secretary Bill Meeks, and Executive Director of Governmental Affairs Rick Weidman take a close look at the work we are doing for Veterans.

Vietnam Veterans of America national president John Rowan Vice-president Marsha Four, Treasurer, Dr. Wayne Reynolds, National Secretary Bill Meeks, and Executive Director of Governmental Affairs Rick Weidman take a close look at the work we are doing for Veterans.

VFW tour including Adjutant General Bob Wallace, Sr. Vice Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman, and other VFW leadership. Partners like the VFW help us better serve our Veterans.

Hosted the first female American Legion National Commander Denise Rohan, as she toured the new Veterans medical center.
Research

- In anticipation of opening the new research building at the new Veterans medical center, we have grown significantly the number of VA-funded biomedical researchers, all of whom are affiliated with either Tulane or LSU Schools of Medicine.
- The majority of our biomedical investigators have a neuroscience focus and their research is highly relevant to VA health priorities, including suicide, pain, PTSD, TBI, and substance abuse.
- In the coming year, we expect to see a strong growth in clinical trial research thus providing Veteran patients with immediate access to emerging treatment options.

SLVHCS promotes quality of care

- Advanced ambulatory surgery program with a sustained rate of zero surgical site infections
- Maintained a rate of zero health care associated infections in the inpatient unit.

SLVHCS focuses on community coordination

- My VA Community Council, co-chaired by two Veterans, meets quarterly to address Veteran issues.
- Quarterly VSO meetings
- 114 Veterans Choice Program provider agreements
- Outsourcing breast imaging, radiation oncology, Mohs dermatological surgery

Patriots of the Month

- Juan Perez, Lieutenant, Police Service
- Donovan Ohrt, Supervisor, Specimen Collection Pathology Service
- Lynette Johns-Major, Respiratory Therapist, Medicine Service
- Doug Decastro, Biomedical Equipment Support Specialist, Facilities Management
- Junius Moore, Program Analyst, Social Work Service
- Marlene Birden, Health Technician, Nursing Service
- Douglas Clark, Administrative Assistant, Police Service
- Karen Washington, Program Support Assistant, Associate Director, Patient Care Service
- Abrel Smith, Lead Police Officer, Police Service
- Leah Traverse, Food Service Systems Dietitian, Nutrition & Food Service
- Robert Manness, Veterans Experience Officer, Director’s Office
We show strength in services through efficiencies that lead to awards and recognition.

National awards:

- Highest patient safety award in VHA, Gold RCA Cornerstone Award.
- VA Secretary David Shulkin presented SLVHCS with the Extraordinary Employer Support Award from the Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve. Only 15 are given per year and this was the first time it had been awarded in Louisiana.
- Dr. Michelle Guidry named a top 2017 hospitalist by the American College of Physicians.
- SLVHCS earned a silver award in the first ever VHA Workplace Wellness Award of Excellence.
- The SLVHCS homeless Program received the Secretary’s Award for Outstanding Achievement in Service of Homeless Veterans.
- Hollie Rodrigue and Cindy Lescale were named 2017 VA Interior Designers of the Year.
- SLVHCS received the Practice Greenhealth Partner Recognition Award.

Local awards:

- Social Worker Jennifer Hannon was named 2017 Louisiana Social Worker of the Year by the Louisiana Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.
- Associate Chief of Staff for Primary Care Dr. Jamie Buth won the Forum for Equality’s 2017 Acclaim Award for Health.
- SLVHCS designated as a leader in the Lesbian Gay Bi-Sexual Transgender and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Healthcare Equality Index.
“I feel a whole lot better and I think I’m progressing in getting stronger by completing my occupational therapy here,” said Veteran Will Spears. “This therapy is working for me in getting back some balance and I can tell a difference when I transfer from my wheelchair to the car, couch or bed. But I can still improve.”

“VA has been the number one support group that I’ve had so far,” said Army Veteran King Rowe. “I haven’t been able to find anywhere else that I can get the health care that I need, the whole full circle of health care…it’s come a long way.”
### Access to care
- 3% growth in new enrollees over the last two years
- 7% growth in total number of patient visits since FY15
- 98.34% of established patients and 80.07% of new patients are seen within 30 days of creating an appointment
- 18.97% receiving virtual care in FY17 (National: 12.24%)

### My HealtheVet
- Registered users:
  - FY15: 28,980
  - FY16: 32,736
  - FY17: 38,236
- Secure messaging users:
  - FY15: 16,176
  - FY16: 19,261
  - FY17: 22,897

### C&P Exams
- 24,716 claims processed
- 86 percent within 30 days
- Average processing time: 17.4 days

**No. 1 in the nation for My HealtheVet registered users.**
Community Resource & Referral Center

- Over 267,000 client interactions in FY17
  - 30% Veterans
  - 43,500 meals served
  - 42,600 showers provided
  - washed over 35,600 loads of laundry
  - 23,500 hygiene kits provided

Suicide prevention outreach

- In FY17, responded to 1,015 crisis calls
- Participated in 96 community outreach events

Reducing opioid use

- From 2012 to 2017, we have reduced the opioid prescribing rate from 17% to 10% and are working to make further reductions.

“I had this amazing system behind me to help me get well,” said Navy Veteran Karl Allen. “But it will help you take big steps to become a contributing citizen again and feel good about yourself, so that your confidence grows, and you can express yourself. Don’t sit around and isolate yourself from the world around you. Until you change your thinking, you will just recycle your experiences. I’m not afraid now. My mind is made up. Don’t give up. There’s still more to learn in life. This is a brand new me.”

“You need to be open so you can try new activities and learn new things,” said Veteran Carlos Urbina. “You don’t always need medication to get over your anxiety, fears and negative thoughts. These different therapies give you a lot of benefits.”
Annual Stand Down for Homeless Veterans

- Held annually on Make A Difference Day
- More than 285 volunteers
- Approximately 20 Veterans service organizations and community partners
- More than 225 Veterans received the following services:
  - hot meals and non-perishable food
  - clothing
  - health care screenings and medical services such as prescription fills, dental, podiatry, mental health and primary care.