

Dear Members of NACHC's Veterans Interest Group (VIG) —

February 7, 2023

As we move into 2023, we are reminded of a quote by a former world leader— “may we live in interesting times”!! The year ahead is fraught with challenges, but it also should provide opportunities for health centers to be leaders and innovators in improving the health of the people and the communities they serve. During this year, it is important that health centers continue their commitment to provide timely and compassionate care that meets the unique medical, behavioral, and social needs of Veterans in their communities. To that end, know that NACHC staff is committed to continuing its support of your efforts to serve Veterans.

UPCOMING EVENTS/MARK YOUR CALENDAR:

- 1) **NACHC's 2023 Policy & Issues (P&I) Forum (March 8-11, Washington, DC)**—this is the first opportunity for this conference to be in-person since the beginning of the pandemic! Given the importance of future health center funding, we are hoping for a large and vociferous group of attendees. Learn more: <https://www.nachc.org/conferences/policy-and-issues/>
- 2) **In-person Veterans Interest Group (March 10 @ 4:30-6 PM ET, Marriott Marquis DC, Gallaudet Room)**—we continue including this event in major NACHC conferences. Please send us any suggestions for topics/issues to include in the agenda for this meeting. Email trainings@nachc.org
- 3) **Webinar on the new PACT Act (March 22 @ 2-3 PM ET)**—in addition to expanding access to services for military personnel who were exposed to hazardous/toxic waste situations, this legislation contains other provisions health centers need to understand. This webinar is designed to educate health center staff on the relevance of the 2022 PACT Act and enactment implications for patients. Register: https://nachc.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_HBFMhfaaSceO37P-lmTuYw

FY 2024 BUDGET ISSUES: Adequate grant funding is an essential element of the revenues that support health center operations. Funding for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023 is in place; however, the next fiscal year (2024) is still to be determined. Health center funding is a combination of discretionary appropriations and mandatory funds. Since the new Congress will be looking closely at both types of funding, NACHC's highest advocacy priority is to secure sufficient discretionary and mandatory funding for health centers. Success will depend on an “all hands-on deck” community mobilization effort. Learn more at <https://www.hcadvocacy.org/>

U.S. VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA): Overall funding for the federal Veterans Administration is in place for FFY 2023 and it represents an increase over the prior fiscal year's funding level. While current year funding continues to include dollars for community care (services provided by non-VHA community based providers, like health centers), the VHA budget increases are mostly focused on preserving and strengthening its infrastructure. One area that NACHC will be monitoring is how the VHA will be allocating resources to enhance behavioral health capacity and emergency care capacity as it attempts to tackle the ongoing problem of suicides among Veterans. While we continue our efforts to

work with VHA staff, we need your input to help identify specific questions/concerns you want us to address.

STATUS OF THE VHA VETSmile PILOT PROGRAM: VHA staff recently completed its strategic assessment of the first year of the pilot program. This assessment resulted in the VHA implementing changes in the pilot program’s framework. The framework for pilot year 2 will focus on 3-5 sites of care, e.g., dental schools, that are able to provide fully or predominantly pro bono care and submission of patient-level data. These changes will be codified in a new Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that will supersede all existing MOA’s; the new MOA should be implemented in February. Given health center legislative and statutory requirements related to billing and collection, the new MOA will not allow health centers to be part of the pilot program and maintain compliance with health center program requirements. The VETSmile team is planning to reach out to all health centers with executed MOAs to discuss next steps to ensure that there is no gap in oral health services for Veterans who were referred and treated as part of the VETSmile program. The VETSmile team has emphasized to us that these pilot changes will not affect health centers’ ability to treat Veterans as part of the health center’s regular patient roster.

NACHC’s Updated Technical Assistance Documents – Check out: *“Serving Veterans in Health Centers: A Compendium of Success Stories”* and *“Community Care Network (CCN) Backgrounder and Toolkit”* featured on NACHC’s “Serving Veterans” webpage: <https://www.nachc.org/health-center-issues/special-populations/veterans/> or the Health Center Resource Clearinghouse, www.healthcenterinfo.org

We look forward to seeing you in March—in the meantime, stay safe and remain focused on the important work you do every day! Please reach out to Dick Bohrer (pard24@hotmail.com) or me with any questions or requests!

Sincerely,
Gina Capra, M.P.A.
Senior Vice President, Training and Technical Assistance, NACHC
gcapra@nachc.org or mobile phone 240-565-5154