Message from the Director

Dear friends,

First, I’d like to thank you for your continued partnership and support of the Erie VA Medical Center (VAMC). When I rejoined the Erie VAMC team this past June as Director, I was quickly reminded why Erie VAMC is recognized as one of the best VA’s in the Nation. We have exceptional staff, volunteers, Veterans, and community partners committed to one shared goal: to build upon excellence and improve care for Veterans. And for that, I thank you!

I am extremely proud of all we have accomplished this year. Throughout 2016, we have continued to align our actions with Veterans Health Administration’s (VHA’s) five leading priorities: 1) providing timely access to care, 2) enhancing employee engagement, 3) building a high performance network, 4) creating and sharing best practices within VA, and 5) building trust in VA care by putting Veterans first in all we do.

With these key priorities leading the way, we have been recognized as one of the top 25 hospitals in the country for environmental excellence (see page 5), we established a MyVA Community Engagement Board to provide a better network of support for Veterans (see page 10), we expanded access to mental health care using telehealth services (see page 9), we opened a new parking garage for more convenient access to care, we were awarded $25M in construction funds to improve our facility and invest in our future (see page 13), and much, much more which you will see throughout this report.

Without further ado, I’m pleased to present our 2016 Annual Report—a glimpse of all we have accomplished together.

Thank you all again for your partnership and commitment to the Veterans we serve. And, most importantly, thank you to all our Veterans for your selfless and courageous service to your country. We are honored to be your VA. We look forward to an amazing 2017!

John Gennaro
Director, Erie VAMC
Erie VA Medical Center (VAMC) serves more than 21,500 Veterans throughout the tri-state area in northwestern Pennsylvania, northeastern Ohio, and western New York with a Total Operating Budget of $150,137,565. In addition to the main medical center located in Erie, Erie VAMC also operates five community based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) aimed at making health care more accessible to Veterans in their own communities (see page 15).

### Hospital Care Provided

- **262,272** Outpatient Visits
  - Total outpatient visits provided, including CBOCs.
- **2,659** Surgical Procedures
  - Total Ambulatory Surgery Clinic procedures.
- **672** Admissions
  - Total number of veterans admitted for care, including observations.
- **52** Operating Beds
  - Total number of hospital and nursing home beds currently available.

### Telehealth Care Provided

- **11,405** Encounters
  - Encounters include Home Telehealth, Store & Forward, and Clinical Video Telehealth.
- **8,899** Secure Messaging
  - Unique veterans used secure messaging.
- **1,733** Telemental
  - Total number of Telemental health care encounters.
- **20** e-Consult
  - Unique patients served via e-consult.

### Patients, Volunteers, & Employees

- **21,579** Unique Patients
  - Total number of unique patients - 1,627 female; 19,952 male.
- **774** Employees
  - Total number of employees – 140 nurses; 53 physicians.
- **605** Volunteers
  - Total number of volunteers - $376,322 donations; 74,068 volunteer hours.
- **239** Veteran Employees
  - Number of employees who served in the military.
In 2016, Erie VAMC earned a 5-star rating as one of VA’s Highest Performing Hospitals in Healthcare Quality based on the VA Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) Model. SAIL is used as an internal improvement tool within VHA, to spotlight the successful strategies of VA’s top performers and to share best practices in quality, safety, and satisfaction across all of its VAMCs.

As a VA top performer, Erie VAMC has developed and shared many best practices. Our Behavioral Health Clinic (BHC), which is ranked #1 in the Nation, developed a tool used to enhance response times to homeless Veterans in need (see page 8). BHC also embraced telehealth services to provide virtual mental health services to Veterans who would not have otherwise received support. Our Women Veterans Program along with Dietetics have rolled out a lactation support program for women Veterans. Our facilities team has been recognized for environmental excellence in water conservation and efficiency. This culture of continuous improvement spreads throughout our facility and Erie VAMC remains committed to building on excellence.
Erie VA Medical Center prioritizes green practices in our day-to-day operations as an organizational imperative. It’s an honor to be recognized for our commitment to the health and safety of our patients, staff, environment, and the community at large.

John Poshka
GEMS Coordinator, OPQ

2016 VA2K Spirit Award

Erie VAMC received the 2016 VA2K Spirit Award, a national award presented by the National VHA Employee Health and Wellbeing Office, to the VA facility that held the most unique event and to the facility that most embodied the spirit of the event – promoting healthy activity and support for homeless Veterans. More than 85 Veterans, VA employees, and community members participated in the annual VA2K Walk & Roll Event which raised $1,800 for local homeless Veterans.

Erie VAMC Named Top 25 Hospitals in Environmental Excellence

Erie VAMC also received the Greenhealth ‘Circles of Excellence’ Award for being a leader in excellence in efficiency and sustainability in water conservation and efficiency. Last year, we reduced water consumption to only 18.5 gallons per square foot of the facility space – the amount of water saved last year compared to our baseline year of 2007 could fill over nine Olympic size swimming pools. Erie VAMC’s efforts have improved environmental quality, reduced utility expenses, and freed up resources to further improve the quality of care provided to Veterans.

Erie VA Medical Center (VAMC) received the Top 25 Environmental Excellence Award as one of the top 25 hospitals in the country recognized for its distinguished body of work in pursuing Environmental Excellence. This award is the most prestigious environmental achievement award offered by Practice Greenhealth which recognizes health care facilities that exemplify environmental excellence and are setting the highest standards for environmental practices in health care.

www.erie.va.gov  Erie VA Medical Center
Providing Timely, High Quality Healthcare

Our mission is to provide timely, high quality health care to Veterans at the right time, in the right place. To support that mission, Erie VAMC regularly monitors access to care to ensure we have the right staff along with the right processes in place to meet patient needs. We’re happy to say that in 2016, 98 percent of patients requesting appointments were seen well within 30 days. Patients are typically seen within six days for primary care services, five days for specialty care services, and less than one day for mental health services.

In 2016, Erie VAMC expanded connected care services, re-established the call center, and launched an audiology and optometry direct scheduling initiative to help achieve our goal of providing convenient, same day access using phone and virtual care services.
Expanding Connected Care (Telehealth) Services

One out of every two Veterans seeking care at Erie VAMC used some form of Connected Care (telehealth) services in 2016. Connected Care includes all non-face-to-face services such as virtual care, secure messaging, VA mobile apps, and telehealth services. The popularity of connected care services continued to grow this year with 8,899 Veterans using secure messaging to communicate with their providers online, 1,733 telemental health care encounters conducted, and 20 e-consults conducted. Erie VAMC has continue to expand telehealth services to ensure Veterans receive the right care, at the right time, in the right place.

Erie VAMC Patient Satisfaction Ranks High

*We asked Veterans to rate us on their VA health experience and *Erie VAMC rated the highest throughout VISN 4 Network in every area!*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>88%</td>
<td>Patients who gave their hospital an overall rating of 9 or 10 on a scale from 0 to 10 (highest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84%</td>
<td>Patients who reported YES, they would definitely recommend their hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87%</td>
<td>Patients who reported that their nurses “Always” communicated well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91%</td>
<td>Patients who reported that their doctors “Always” communicated well</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Re-established Call Center & Improved Phone Tree Options

Based on patient feedback from Veteran Town Halls, Erie VAMC re-established a Call Center adding six full-time staff and two part-time to improve access to care via phone. As a result, call responsiveness has improved significantly. The information below represents activity since the re-establishment of the Call Center from Jul-Dec 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer Time</td>
<td>14 Seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calls per Day</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calls Answered</td>
<td>42,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Calls</td>
<td>0.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Audiology & Optometry Direct Scheduling

In 2016, Erie VAMC launched an Audiology & Optometry Direct Scheduling initiative to allow Veterans direct and easy access to schedule their own routine ear and eye appointments. Direct scheduling eliminates unnecessary steps and unneeded waiting, which further improves wait times and access to care for audiology and optometry clinics. Now, Veterans have direct and easy access to schedule appointments in these specialty care clinics.
Erie VAMC’s Homeless Care Team (HCT) worked with the VISN 4 Data Warehouse to develop a tool to enhance the national Homeless Veteran Clinical Reminder and ultimately, to improve response times to Veterans in need. Now, Veterans in need of homeless support within VISN4 receive faster reliable care from VA’s Homeless Care Teams.

To ensure no Veteran falls through the cracks, Erie VAMC’s HCT teamed helped develop an automatic report and email reminder that prompts local VA HCTs to take action whenever a Veteran screens positive for homelessness or risk of homelessness. After testing and implementing the automated report and email reminder across the VISN, the response times improved dramatically. Today, Veterans who screen positive for homelessness typically receive follow-up from VA’s homeless care team within one-day or less.
Behavioral Health Opens Doors to Recovery

In 2016, Erie VAMC’s Behavioral Health Clinic (BHC) continued to lead the way in providing convenient same-day services by offering some non-traditional methods to reach Veterans. The BHC team worked to overcome barriers to care – including transportation issues, social anxiety limitations, and location barriers – by embracing telehealth technologies to provide the right care at the right time in the right place.

Erie VAMC’s BHC team expanded their use of in-home CVT (clinical video technology) to reach Veterans who faced significant transportation issues or physical limitations that impacted their ability to receive care. The BHC team was able to bring mental health treatment to the Veteran by providing care in the comfort and safety of the Veteran’s own home.

In 2016, the BHC team conducted more than 100 in-home CVT visits for 21 Veterans who otherwise would not have received care.

The BHC team also used CVT services to offer the PTSD Education Program to Veterans at Erie VAMC’s community based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) so that Veterans in rural locations could receive the same services that are offered to patients in Erie. This is a great step toward providing parity for Veterans who live in rural areas – we bring the care to them.

In 2016, Erie VAMC’s Homeless Care Team (HCT) also piloted a new, innovative way of providing services to their hard-to-reach Veteran population by deploying IPADs to each of their staff for “home” visits. With the IPADs in hand, staff can help Veterans access health information, fill out job applications, and even connect Veterans to behavioral health specialists through CVT.

These non-traditional methods of providing behavioral health services broke down barriers to care so that Veterans in need could receive the right services in a place that works best for them.

Growth in Behavioral Health Clinic

![Growth in Behavioral Health Clinic chart]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Visits</th>
<th>Unique Patients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Year 2006</td>
<td>2,876</td>
<td>2,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Year 2008</td>
<td>3,412</td>
<td>3,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Year 2010</td>
<td>4,363</td>
<td>4,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Year 2012</td>
<td>4,526</td>
<td>4,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Year 2014</td>
<td>4,644</td>
<td>4,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Year 2016</td>
<td>5,112</td>
<td>5,112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Veteran & Community Engagement

Engaging with Veterans, their families, and community members through outreaches and Veteran Town Halls has been instrumental in the transformation of VA nationally and locally. Through the feedback we’ve received from patients, along with the community partnerships we’ve built over this year, we’ve been able to accomplish a lot – and we’re just getting started.

In 2016, Erie VA Medical Center established the MyVA Community Engagement Board in Erie, PA. The board members of this community-drive team include Veteran advocates from General Electric, Erie Insurance, Careerlink, the Vet Center, Veterans Miracle Center, Housing and Neighborhood Development Service (HANDS), the YMCA, PA State Police, local universities, Barber National Institute, PA National Guard, and Erie VAMC among others. This diverse and enthusiastic board will collaborate on providing Veterans, transitioning service members, and their families with a seamless community of support.

Erie VAMC, partnered with VVA Post #435 & Erie Vet Center, to host a Vietnam War Commemoration in March 2016 to pay tribute to local Vientam Veterans.
Veteran Town Halls

This past year, the Erie VAMC leadership team hosted a number of Veteran Town Halls throughout the Erie and surrounding areas to actively seek out feedback from Veterans about their VA health care. This feedback has been used to drive improvements within the Erie VAMC including re-establishing a Call Center to improve call responsiveness, launching a new direct scheduling initiative for easier access to specialty care clinics, and partnered with the YMCA to host FREE on-site fitness classes.

Employee Engagement

In 2016, Erie VAMC made a commitment to invest in employees by creating a work environment where employees feel valued, supported, and encouraged to do their best for Veterans. Leadership held a number of employee town halls and focus groups to hear how we can make Erie VAMC the best place to work. In response, leadership hosted an employee appreciation picnic, invested in additional resources and employees, implemented open door hours with the director, and offered free on-site fitness classes for employees four days a week. Why? Because great care for Veterans starts with our employees.

Welcome Home Event

More than 920 Veterans and their families—our biggest turnout yet—attended Erie VAMC’s 2016 Welcome Home Veterans Appreciation Event at the Erie Zoo. More than 14 VA health programs and 18 community agencies partnered together on-site at the Zoo to provide a one-stop-shop for Veterans and their families to connect with a variety of Veteran-related services while providing family friendly entertainment throughout the evening.

Erie VAMC Dietitians partnered with the Second Harvest Food Bank to bring a mobile food pantry to 62 Veterans.

Community Engagement, At A Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Outreaches</th>
<th>Media Engagement</th>
<th>Town Halls</th>
<th>Followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Total number of community outreaches</td>
<td>Total number of media engagements</td>
<td>Total number of Veteran Town Halls hosted</td>
<td>Total number of social media &amp; web followers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Erie VAMC supervisors enjoyed serving lunch to staff during the employee appreciation summer picnic.

Year in Review

The time we spent with our Veterans can’t be summed up in a single article. So, we invite you to visit a special Year in Review page on our Erie VAMC website to view photos from some of our favorite events and see the faces of our community:


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CLC Groundbreaking Ceremony - The Erie VAMC Leadership, VISN 4 & VACO Capital Asset Managers, and contractors proudly broke ground on the new CLC.

Committing to the Future

In 2016, Erie VAMC was awarded $25 million for construction and renovation plans designed to improve the overall patient experience. These plans include the addition of a stand-alone Community Living Center (CLC), renovation of the existing and aged boiler plant, exterior structural maintenance, emergency power generation, and a traffic flow improvement project for the main entrance.

“Erie VA Medical Center is a part of the redevelopment of Erie as we invest in the future of the Veteran’s we serve right here on 38th Street. The award of these construction projects shows a clear investment in the future of the Veteran’s we serve and, ultimately, in the longevity of our facility.”

John A. Gennaro
Director, Erie VA Medical Center
2016 Construction Projects

Parking Garage – Now Open
Erie VAMC opened the new 280-space parking garage in June 2016. The new parking garage is equipped with energy efficient HVAC and LED lighting. These additional parking spaces have significantly improved access to care and patient satisfaction by providing ample facility parking.

Community Living Center – Under Construction
In fall of 2016, Erie VAMC broke ground on the new 22-bed Community Living Center (CLC). The CLC project includes all private rooms and bathrooms, community living rooms, and a kitchen to create a more home-like feel for residents. The new stand-alone facility is expected to be completed in Spring 2018.

Warren VA Clinic Renovation – Completed
A newly renovated Warren VA Clinic emerged this past fall. The construction project added an additional 2,000 square feet and renovated the existing 4,500 square feet. The new space includes a private women’s health suite, a larger private group room to increase capacity for telehealth groups, a larger waiting and reception area, additional exam rooms, a specialty care area, and additional handicapped parking for easier access to care.

Traffic Flow Changes

Coming soon - Erie VAMC will have a new entrance on 38th Street as part of a traffic improvement plan currently under construction to make room for the addition of the new CLC. Please pardon our dust as we work to enhance our campus!

Map of the Erie VAMC Post-Construction

For the most recent information on construction projects at the Erie VA Medical Center, please visit:

www.erie.va.gov/construction
Erie VAMC and its community based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) serve more than 21,000 Veterans, yet many Veterans still don’t know that they may be eligible for care. We’d like to address some of the most common myths we hear about enrolling for VA health care so we can set the record straight.

**Common myths about enrolling for VA health care**

**Myth 1:** “I didn’t serve in combat/I wasn’t injured in the service, so I’m not eligible for VA health care.”
False. If you served in the military – even during peacetime – in the active military, naval, or air service, and are separated under any condition other than dishonorable, you may quality for VA health care benefits. Contact a VA Eligibility representative today.

**Myth 2:** “I don’t want to go to the VA because I want to save those appointments for those who really need it.”
Fact: The more Veterans that use our services, the more funding and resources we receive so we can continue serving more and more Veterans. You do not take away from another Veteran so see if you’re eligible today!

**Myth 3:** “I make too much money so I’ve never applied for VA care.”
Fact: It’s not all about income. There are many other factors taken into consideration when applying for VA health care. Other factors include having a service-related injury or illness (such as exposure to Agent Orange), when and where you served, if you are a former Prisoner of War, if you received a Purple Heart Medal, etc. Don’t assume, speak with a VA eligibility representative today.

**Myth 4:** “I want to go to the VA but I don’t want to lose my private health insurance.”
Here’s some great news – assuming you are eligible for VA health care, you do not need to give up your private health insurance. You can keep your own insurance and seek health care from the VA as well – the best of both worlds.

**Bottom line:** If you have served in the military, you may be eligible for VA health care. Refer a friend today! Apply online at www.va.gov/health, in-person by stopping into the Erie VAMC Eligibility Office between the hours of 7:30a.m.-4:30 p.m. with your DD-214, or call 814-860-2970 or toll-free at 1-800-274-8387 to speak with an eligibility representative.

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**Help Us Expand Our Reach**

Refer a Veteran to Erie VAMC for Care

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**Be A Battle Buddy**

Help Us, Help the Community

Become an Erie VAMC Volunteer!

Erie VAMC volunteers play an important role in providing exceptional care to the Veterans we are so honored to serve. From working the greeters desk at the main entrance, to driving Veterans to and from their health care appointments, to visiting with Veterans in our Community Living Center, there is a right volunteer fit for you! We have a number of opportunities throughout the medical center that help make our patients’ stay more enjoyable. Call our Voluntary Service Office at 814-860-2454 today to learn more, or visit www.erie.va.gov/giving.
Contact Us

Important Contacts

Main Line – Phone Tree
814-868-8661
1-800-274-8387 (toll free)
• Press 1 - Pharmacy
• Press 2 - Appointments & Specialty Care Providers
• Press 3 - Nurse Line
• Press 4 - Eligibility
• Press 5 - Billing
• Press 7 - Veterans Crisis Line

Eligibility
814-860-2970

Veterans Crisis Line
www.veteranscrisisline.net
1-800-273-8255

Release of Information
814-860-2212

Behavioral Health Clinic
814-860-2038

Transition & Care Management (OEF/OIF/OND)
814-860-2965

Medication Refills
814-868-6284
1-800-274-8387 (toll-free)

Medical Social Work
814-860-2529

Women Veterans Program
814-860-2907

MOVE! Weight Management
814-860-2554

Caregiver Support Program
814-860-2657

Non-VA Care Notification
Notify within 72 hours
814-860-2800 (M-F 8a-4:30p)
814-868-8661 (After hours, ask for Medical Administration Assistant)

C.B.O.C.s

- Ashtabula VA Clinic
  2044 Lambros Ln
  Ashtabula, OH 44004
  Phone: 866-463-0912

- Crawford VA Clinic
  16954 Conneaut Lk Rd
  Meadville, PA 16335
  Phone: 866-962-3210

- Venango VA Clinic
  464 Allegheny Blvd
  Franklin, PA 16323
  Phone: 866-962-3260

- Warren VA Clinic
  3 Farm Colony Dr
  Warren, PA 16365
  Phone: 866-682-3250

- McKean VA Clinic
  23 Kennedy St
  Bradford, PA 16701
  Phone: 814-368-3019
On behalf of the Erie VA Medical Center, we thank you for your continued partnership and support. It is a privilege to serve alongside so many employees, community partners, and Veterans who share our commitment to providing exceptional health care to our Nation's Veterans. Thank you for making 2016 a year to remember!

**Writer/Editor**  
Sarah Gudgeon

**Designer**  
Adrian Osman

The Erie Veterans Affairs Medical Center Annual Report is an official publication produced by the Office of Public Affairs and printed using appropriated funds in compliance with federal regulations. Contents of this report are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans Health Administration, or the Erie VA Medical Center.