

## Supporting the Geriatric Workforce and Older Veterans: Department of Veterans Affairs

*Forty-seven percent of the more than 22.2 million U.S. veterans are over 65 years.<sup>i</sup>*

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), has long been a leader in geriatrics and gerontology. The commitment of the VHA to specialize in the care of older veterans has allowed for the development, testing, and training of specialized programs focused on older patients. VA research on older adults is critical to creating better models of care and improving the patient experience in all settings of care. Continued investments in geriatrics and gerontology programs within the VA will support the innovation needed to meet the growing needs of the aging Veteran and U.S. population overall.

### VA & GERIATRICS TEAM CARE

#### Interdisciplinary Team Care

Interdisciplinary team care, the hallmark of geriatric medicine, is the foundation of the VA's approach to care. Throughout VA Medical Centers, inpatient, outpatient, and home-based care is person-centered and outcome driven. Programs offered to veterans include home and community-based services, as well as nursing home and residential care. Person-centered care is paramount to the VA. The VA shared decision making structure involves the Veteran, family caregivers, and members of the care team working together. Interdisciplinary care teams are found in all care settings and across medical, rehabilitation, psychological, and psychosocial needs. Additionally, the shared decision making process includes caregiver assessment; a critical tool in supporting family caregivers.

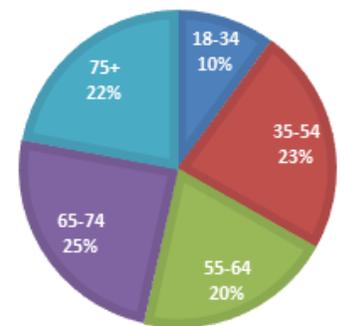
#### VA Services & Programs

VA Services include: adult day health care, Home Based Primary Care, homemakers and home health aide care, hospice and palliative care, Program of All-Inclusive Care of the Elderly (PACE), respite care, skilled nursing care, skilled home health care, Medical Foster Home, telehealth care, mental health care, and Veteran-Directed Care.

Older Veterans receive care in a variety of VA clinical settings from multiple health care providers. Geriatric specialists play a crucial role in training, consultation, and support for all VA providers to meet the needs of Veterans in all care settings. These services and programs include:

- Alzheimer's and Dementia Care
  - Provided throughout the full range of VA health care services and may include home based primary care, homemaker/home health aide, respite, mental health care, and more
- Geriatric Evaluation and Management
  - Includes an evaluation for older veterans performed by care team in an inpatient or outpatient setting
- Outpatient Geriatric Primary Care
  - VA care team provides coordinated care that includes medical care, nursing care, therapy, mental health, disease treatment/prevention, health maintenance, education, and more
- Home Based Primary Care
  - For Veterans who have complex health care needs for whom routine clinic-based care is not effective
- Medical Foster Homes
  - Alternative to a nursing home for veterans who require nursing home care but prefer a non-institutional setting; a trained caregiver is on duty 24/7
- Community Living Centers
  - Receive nursing home level of care, including skilled nursing, medical care, help with activities of daily living

### U.S. VETERANS BY AGE



Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,

## VA & GERIATRICS WORKFORCE and TRAINING

*Today, 25% of all geriatric medicine training slots and approximately 50% geriatric psychiatry slots are financially supported by VA.*

### Veterans Health Administration Fellowships

The VA Special Fellowships Program, now the VA Advanced Fellowships Program:

- Develops physician and dentist clinical proficiency, academic scholarship and leadership
- Contributes to a talented, well trained recruitment pool
- Fosters an atmosphere of scientific inquiry and excellence within the VA

This program has resulted in critical research, clinical advancements, and education which are important, not only to the work and mission of the VA, but also to the quality of the nation's healthcare overall.<sup>ii</sup>

*Nearly 50% of all geriatric medicine residents and over 50% of geriatric psychiatry residents in the U.S. receive some or all of their training in VHA facilities.*

### Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Centers

Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Centers (GRECCs) are VA-funded programs established to attract scientists and health science students to the field of geriatrics. The goals are to:

- Increase the basic knowledge of aging;
- Innovate and evaluate new models of care;
- Transmit this knowledge to health care providers;
- Improve the quality of care delivered to elders.

Twenty (20) GRECCs in 18 states compete for research grants to conduct basic laboratory research on the origins of aging and the diseases commonly associated with it, as well as research on how care is delivered to elders and the effects of rehabilitation. GRECCs disseminate new and existing knowledge of geriatrics gained through research. GRECCs are instrumental in training professionals across disciplines and establishing aging programs at schools of medicine<sup>iii</sup>. GRECCs also work with clinical staff in VA medical centers to provide staff training and demonstrate new and improved ways for care to be delivered to older Veterans.

*Almost all VA internships and postdoctoral programs train psychologists in gero-psychology. The VA developed and funded the Geriatric Clinic Nurse Specialist and Geriatric Nurse Practitioner Training programs. The VA is also the largest trainer of clinical social workers.*

<sup>i</sup> [http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran\\_Population.asp](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.va.gov/oa/specialfellows/>

<sup>iii</sup> Supiano MA, Alessi C, Chernoff R, Goldberg A, Morley JE, Schmadler KE, Shay K; GRECC Directors Association. *Department of Veterans Affairs Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Centers: translating aging research into clinical geriatrics.* J Am Geriatr Soc. 2012 Jul;60(7):1347-56. doi: 10.1111/j.1532-5415.2012.04004.x. Epub 2012 Jun 15.

Website: [www.eldercareworkforce.org](http://www.eldercareworkforce.org)

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The Eldercare Workforce Alliance is a project of The Advocacy Fund

*The positions of the Eldercare Workforce Alliance reflect a consensus of 75 percent or more of its members. Statements reflect the consensus of the Alliance and do not necessarily represent the position of individual Alliance member organizations.*