



2021 VA Be Connected Community Mental Health Summit

October 20, 2021 | 8:30 - 11:30

Speakers & Breakout Presenters

(In order of appearance)

Thomas Winkel, MA, LPC, NCC - Director, Arizona Coalition for Military Families



Thomas is the Director of a nationally-recognized collective impact initiative focused on building Arizona's statewide capacity to care for all service members, veterans, their families and communities. He was a principle team member in reducing the deaths by suicide among Arizona National Guard members from the highest level in its history to zero for over three years. He is also a principle leader in the creation and implementation of both Be Connected and the Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment.

Mr. Winkel worked on the development of the White House Executive Order - PREVENTS, is on the Governor's Workforce Arizona Council and Commission for Service and Volunteerism, has spoken, nationally, internationally, at the White House and at Congressional Hearings on a range of subjects and has been the Lead and Co-Lead on Arizona's Governor/Mayor Challenges SAMHSA/VA Team for the past 11 years.

Mr. Winkel is a combat veteran of the United States Marine Corps and served in the Arizona and Oregon Army National Guard. His service in the U.S.M.C. included tours in Japan, the Philippines and Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm during the first Gulf War.

Michael W. Fisher - Network Director, VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), 22



Mr. Michael Fisher was appointed as the Network Director, VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), 22 effective September 14, 2018. He has executive oversight of eight VA Health Care systems and 65 community clinics in Arizona, Southern California and New Mexico.

He served previously as Medical Center Director of VA Portland Healthcare System with responsibility for overseeing the VA Portland Healthcare System and ten Community Based Outpatient Clinics.

Mr. Fisher served as Medical Center Director of the VA Long Beach Healthcare System in Southern California from 2014 to 2016, and prior to that assignment, he held the position of Deputy Network Director of the VA Northwest Healthcare Network where he developed a comprehensive rural health care plan, a financial infrastructure that provided standardized accounting and budgeting processes, and established an organizational structure with data tools to strengthen operational knowledge and efficiencies. Mr. Fisher has been employed by the Veterans Health Administration since 1993.

Dr. Leslie Lockridge, DNP - Associate Director, Patient Care Services/Nurse Executive, Phoenix VA Health Care System (PVAHCS)



Dr. Leslie Lockridge was appointed Associate Director, Patient Care Services/Nurse Executive (ADPCS/NE) for the Phoenix VA Health Care System (PVAHCS) in November 2020 and served as the Acting ADPCS/NE since November 2019. Her areas of responsibility include the oversight of Nursing Services, Social Work Service, Sterile Processing Service, and the Chaplain Service.

Prior to her appointment as ADPCS/NE, Dr. Lockridge served as the Deputy Nurse Executive (DNE) at PVAHCS. Additionally, she spent time as the Acting ADPCS/NE at the New Mexico VA Healthcare System (NMVAHCS). Dr. Lockridge has experience as a critical care nurse and has held progressive leadership positions in both inpatient and outpatient care. Dr. Lockridge held roles as Chief Nurse, Geriatrics and Extended Care (GEC) and Chief Nurse, Specialty and Critical Care at PVAHCS. She also served as Interim Chief Nurse of Acute Care and Medicine at Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) and held various Nurse Manager roles.

Dr. Lockridge earned a Doctor of Nurse Practice (DNP) with an emphasis in Health Systems Leadership from Chamberlain University, a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) from Middle Tennessee State University, and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from Tennessee State University. Dr. Lockridge is a 2018 graduate of the Healthcare Leadership Development Program (HCLDP), is a VA Certified Mentor, and holds board certifications in critical care (CCRN) and as a Nurse Executive (NE-BC).

Steve Sample - Interim Director, Northern Arizona VA Health Care System (NAVAHCS)



Steve Sample was appointed as the Interim Associate Director for the Northern Arizona VA Health Care System on January 31, 2021. Previously, he served as the Assistant Director at Southern Arizona VA Health Care System since January 2018. He provides direct oversight of business operations related to Logistics, Voluntary Services, Environmental Management, Veteran Experience, Public Affairs, Medical Media, System Redesign, Prosthetics, and is the facility liaison for Veteran Canteen Service, Information Security and Information and Technology Service Operations. He is a 2017 graduate of Leadership VA (LVA) and Health Care Leadership Development Program (HCLDP).

Mr. Sample joined the VA as the Tucson VA Compliance Officer in 2007. He subsequently served as the team lead for the Office of Compliance and Business Integrity's Consultation and Assessment Section under Quality, Safety and Value. Prior to his appointment to the Executive Leadership Team, he served as the Chief of Group Practice and Management Support Service encompassing patient access to care, strategic planning, executive decision support, systems redesign, VERA, managerial cost accounting, and data analytics.

Prior to his tenure with the VA, Mr. Sample served in a variety of leadership positions. He served in the U.S. Air Force for 23 years. He was a command pilot and flew combat missions during Operations Desert Storm and was the deployed commander of a combat flying squadron during Operation Allied Force. Mr. Sample is a graduate of the Air War College and Air Command and Staff College.

Jennifer S. Gutowski MHA, FACHE - Director, Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS)



Jennifer S. Gutowski, MHA, FACHE was appointed as Director of the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System on February 2, 2020. The SAVAHCS comprises a VA Medical Center in Tucson, and seven community clinics located in Safford, Casa Grande, Sierra Vista, Yuma, Green Valley, and Northwest and Southeast Tucson.

Ms. Gutowski joined the VA in 1999 and has a track record of progressive professional development and career growth spanning field management experience, operations support, and program management. She served as Director of the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) Honolulu from May 2017 to January 2020. In that position, she oversaw a broad range of medical services, with an annual budget of over \$335 million serving approximately 129,000 Veterans throughout Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa and Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Ms. Gutowski was Interim Director of the SAVAHCS from January 2016 through March 2017. She served as the System's Associate Director from July 2012 through January 2016 and again from March through May 2017. Prior to 2012, Ms. Gutowski had served as Acting Associate Director and Assistant Director of the Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital near Chicago, and held various positions at the VA Long Beach (California) Health Care System.

Tracie Pinkston - Acting Director, Phoenix VA Regional Office



Mrs. Pinkston was selected to the position of Assistant Director in November 2019, and she is currently serving as the Acting Director for the Phoenix VA Regional Office. She shares responsibility for the effective and efficient direction, control, and operation of benefits delivery for Veterans and dependents residing in the State of Arizona. The Phoenix VARO administers compensation, pension and Veteran readiness benefits for over 560,000 veterans and their families in the state. In addition, the Phoenix VARO supports a National Call Center.

Prior to this appointment, she served as the Support Services Chief at the Phoenix VARO from February 2018. In this role, she was responsible for overseeing the operations of the finance and administrative programs and served as an advisor to the Directors on all phases of support functions for the Phoenix and Albuquerque VAROs, Pacific District Office and Denver Human Resources Center. During her time in the Support Services Division (SSD), she also completed several details at VA Central Office (VACO) in Washington, DC. Mrs. Pinkston served as a member of the Support Services Council (SSC) which primarily served as a liaison between VAROs and VACO, providing national strategic planning and change management for SSD.

Mrs. Pinkston began her VA career as a Work Study under the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) as a Program Support Assistant in the Phoenix National Call Center in 2008. She transferred to SSD under SCEP in August 2008 as an Accountant. During her time in SSD, she also held positions as a Supervisory Financial Administrative Specialist and Assistant SSD Chief.

Wanda Wright - Director, Arizona Department of Veterans' Services



Col. Wanda Wright is the third generation of her family to serve in the U.S. military. She has three decades of military experience. As a 1985 United States Air Force Academy graduate, Col. Wright began her military career as Deputy Budget Officer with the Tactical Air Command at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina with a follow-on assignment to Davis-Monthan AFB as the Budget Officer.

Leaving active duty in 1990, Col. Wright joined the Arizona National Guard. During the next 21 years, she served in various positions including accounting and finance officer, communications officer, executive officer and, finally, as the Director of Staff for the Adjutant General in Phoenix. Among her proudest achievements was to serve as Air Commander of Operation Jump Start from June 2006 to December 2008 during which she commanded more than 4,000 airmen from 52 states and territories on our Southwest border.

In 2018, Col. Wright was appointed to the VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans, an expert national panel that advises the secretary on issues and programs impacting women veterans.

Dr. Roberta Lee, MD - Medical Director, SAVAHCS Whole Health



Roberta Lee is the Medical Director for Whole Health at the Southern Arizona Veterans Healthcare system in Tucson. She is participating in a nation-wide effort to introduce integrative medicine to the Nation's 10 million veterans. In 2017, the Tucson VA became a regional Whole Health Flagship site designed to demonstrate a model of care for implementing integrative medicine in a federal institution.

Dr. Lee served a term as Vice Chair of the Department of Integrative Medicine at Mt. Sinai Beth Israel Hospital in New York, and she was Medical Director of the Center for Health and Healing, one of New York's first multidisciplinary integrative medicine primary care facilities.

For over a decade, Dr. Lee has investigated the traditional use of medicinal plants and she continues to be an advisory member of the American Botanical Council, a non-profit organization that serves as an international information resource for scientific information on botanical supplements and ethnobotanical research. She is now focusing her professional interests in traditional medicine to East Asian practices and is interested in educating her patients on more of these teachings, especially the self-care components.

Dr. Lee is a recognized expert on the use of alternative, integrative therapies. In 2010, she released her book, "The SuperStress Solution," and she has authored and edited many texts on integrative medicine. She continues to write and speak about stress, wellness, the use of botanical supplements and alternative health issues. Dr. Lee has been interviewed in print and on the Internet, and she has appeared on the Today show, The View, Fox News, CBS and CNN.

Aaron Eagan - Director - Community-Based Suicide Prevention at VHA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention



Over the last several years, Aaron Eagan has led the implementation of the REACH VET predictive risk model in a national clinical care program and more recently, the launch of a Caring Letters program for the Veterans Crisis Line that will provide more than 90,000 Veterans a year with an evidenced-based intervention for suicide prevention. He now leads an initiative spreading community-based suicide prevention interventions across the VA system.

Mr. Eagan has more than 25 years of nursing and healthcare experience and has developed a diverse array of medical, public health, and leadership experience. He has a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Central Florida and a Master of Public Health from the University of South Florida.

Cicely Burrows-McElwain, LCSW-C - Director, Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC), Community-Based Interventions for Suicide Prevention Program, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Mrs. Cicely Burrows-McElwain joined the VA Office of Suicide Prevention in March of 2021 in the role of Director of the Technical Assistance Resource Center for Community Based Interventions. Prior to taking on this role, she served at SAMHSA, most recently in the role of Military and Veteran Affairs Liaison in the Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs. Over the past four years, her efforts focused on strengthening cross-agency collaboration between VA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Defense in meeting the behavioral health needs of Service Members, Veterans and their Families.

Cicely brings over 20 years of experience working in rural behavioral health systems in local, state, and federal systems. In 2018, she was selected by the George W. Bush Institute to become part of the 33-member inaugural class of the Stand-To Veterans Leadership Program, where she worked to raise awareness on the importance of increasing screening for Veterans in civilian healthcare settings. This is her second time serving in a role at VHA as she joined the team as a clinical social worker for (VISN 5) at the VA Maryland Healthcare System helping to develop and work in the area's first MICHM E-RANGE program.

Her time with the state of Maryland included serving as the youngest regional director for the Wicomico/Somerset Core Service Agency, where she brokered some of the early agreements for community mental health providers to serve Veterans in the Lower Shore of Maryland as the VA was building capacity in that area.

Cicely obtained her Masters of Social Work from the University of Maryland, Baltimore, with a specialized focus in Clinical Services and Human Services Administration and undergraduate degree in the same field from Salisbury University where for the last 16 years she has served as an Adjunct Lecturer II for SU's Social Work Department.

Leonie Heyworth, MD, MPH - Director of Synchronous Telehealth, Office of Connected Care; VHA, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Leonie Heyworth, MD, MPH is a telehealth thought leader dedicated to promoting health care technology. Beginning as a front-line primary care provider in 2015, Dr. Heyworth has partnered her clinical and research experience with an unwavering dedication to telehealth expansion for the six million Veterans who rely on VA for health care.

Leonie's passion for health IT as a field provider led her to her current role as Director of Synchronous Telehealth for VA's Office of Connected Care, where she leads national synchronous telehealth programs, policies and initiatives to enable front-line care teams across the VA enterprise to deliver quality and accessible video telehealth. Dr. Heyworth's efforts have built the foundational elements of VA's telehealth program, enabling rapid change during the COVID pandemic.

Valentin O. Rivish, DNP, RN, NE-BC - National Synchronous Telehealth Education Specialist, Office of Connected Care, VHA, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Dr. Valentin Rivish has been with VA for 21 years, currently as a Synchronous Telehealth Education Specialist at VHA Central Office in the Office of Connected Care. He serves as a national authority in the development and implementation of educational programs/projects of national scope, which are designed to meet specialized educational needs of staff engaged in Synchronous Telehealth programs that deliver mission critical services to Veteran patients.

Jon Perez, Ph.D. - Chief Operating Officer, The NARBHA Institute



Jon Perez brings with him a rich background of experience in clinical psychology and 30 years of federal behavioral health service, from direct care to policy and program management in the U.S. and abroad, including multiple Joint Force deployments.

His federal career in northern Arizona began as Director of Behavioral Health for the White Mountain Apache Tribe, before ultimately directing behavioral health for the Indian Health Service in Washington, D.C., where he provided national program and policy leadership.

Commissioned in the U.S. Public Health Service in 1992, Jon Perez served in a variety of capacities from direct clinical work to managing small-to-large direct service programs. His most recent position was as the Acting Regional Director for the US Department of Health and Human Services in HHS Region IX, where he also served as the Regional Administrator for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Geoff Davis - Chair, Phoenix Arizona Veterans Mental Health Advocacy Council



Geoff has been with the Council for over 10 years serving in various capacities. He serves on several other committees within the Phoenix VA, and also on Senator Kirsten Sinema's Veterans Advisory Council.

Geoff served in the US Army as a 1st Lieutenant in the Medical Service Corps from 1971 to 1973. He has worked in mental and behavioral health agencies for 35 years, and he was Vice-President for a local Arizona area behavioral health company before retiring in 2010. He has a Master's degree in Counseling.

Travis Burns - Co-Chair, Phoenix Veterans Mental Health Advocacy Council



Travis is a Veteran advocate who focuses on military-specific moral conflict and Veteran suicide. He is the author of "Uncomfortably Numb: A Grunt's Perspective on Suicide." Now based in Phoenix, Travis enlisted in the US Army Infantry in 1987, serving in the Korean Demilitarized Zone and in the 1991 Gulf War. His civilian career included operations and sales in the transportation and rental equipment industries.

From 2014-2018, Travis volunteered with Operation Freedom Bird, a nonprofit that takes combat Veterans on annual Healing Journeys to Washington, D.C. Since 2015, he has volunteered with the Phoenix VA Hospital Mental Health Advocacy Council. He also served with the working group for Be Connected, and has completed ASIST and Peer Support training, as well as Resource Navigator Training through the Be Connected program. He is Chair of the Phoenix VA Hospital Veterans Family Advisory Council (VFAC) and Communications Director for Unified Arizona Veterans (UAV).

Valerie Crossman, LCSW - Chair, NAVAHCS Arizona Veterans Mental Health Advocacy Council



Valerie Crossman is the Director of Behavioral Health at U.S.VETS – Prescott. She has been working at U.S.VETS for the last 4 years, supporting veterans experiencing homelessness and identifying housing in the community.

Valerie has been in the social work field for over ten years and has experience working with children and adolescents in residential and outpatient programs and adults with developmental disabilities. She is the spouse of an Army Veteran who served 3 combat tours, and both of her parents served in the Army.

Rocky Coronado - Co-Chair, NAVAHCS Mental Health Advisory Board



Rocky is an Air Force Veteran, and has been a social worker for more than 20 years. He spent over 18 years working as a Case Manager and Program Manager with the Arizona Department of Child Safety. He spent over 2 years working as a Navigator for the Veteran Services Program with Catholic Charities helping veterans obtain housing and keep their existing housing when they were facing eviction.

Rocky is currently a Be Connected Navigator in the Northern Arizona region as a Case Manager for Community Bridges, Inc. (CBI). He enjoys working with and assisting veterans and their families so they can improve their lives. He has been a Navigator with the Be Connected Program since March 2020.

Ramon Encinas - Chair, Southern Arizona Veterans Mental Health Advocacy Council



Ramon "Doc" Encinas served as a Hospital Corpsman (HM), specifically as an FMF Navy Corpsman, meaning that he served with Marines. He is originally from Nogales, and enlisted in the US Navy after graduating Nogales High School. After his military service, he graduated from the University of Arizona and received a unique opportunity to work for Senator John McCain specializing in Veteran and Military issues advocating for Veterans and others.

Ramon founded his own non-profit to help Veterans called My Veteran Passion (MVP) in 2019. MVP was designed to help Veterans transition into the civilian community while still connecting with resources and benefits as well as education. MVP's mission is to bring awareness to Veteran mental health through fitness and virtual gaming to connect with Veterans that have been suffering in silence and who need assistance transitioning to civilian life. Doc has been able to grow this non-profit into a wonderful local community, and now world wide as well.

MVP's Veteran Supporters connect with Veterans through physical training and virtual online platforms. Whether by fitness, education, and other available resources, we can help our nation's warriors in their confidence and help provide a positive environment that will breed success and support in more than physical health, but also mental health.

Ramon has been instrumental in assisting the Veteran mental health community in southern Arizona, and continues to do so throughout the state as a board member to the Arizona Military Family Relief Fund Post-9/11 Advisory Committee.

Dana Allmond, MBA, LTC (U.S. Army Retired) - Co-Chair, Southern Arizona Veterans Mental Health Advocacy Council



Dana Allmond is a mother, veteran, retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, dynamic change agent, and champion for our communities. With more than 23 years of active duty service, Dana had a myriad of assignments at tactical to strategic levels of the Army. She served and protected the life, limb, health, and welfare of tens of thousands of Department of Defense civilians, military members, and military candidates of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard.

As a strong veteran advocate, Dana is the Co-Chair of the Southern Arizona Veterans Mental Health Advocacy Council, a member of the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System Veteran and Family Advisory Council, a member of the national veteran led grassroots organization Common Defense, and a member of Senator Kyrsten Sinema's Veterans Advisory Council.

On May 28, 1994, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Individual Psychology from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant. Her graduate degrees include Master of Science, Counseling and Leader Development from Long Island University, New York in 2002 and Master of Business Administration from Arizona State University in 2019.

Katie E. Civiletto Stenger, MHA - Secretary, Southern Arizona Veterans Mental Health Advocacy Council



Katie Civiletto Stenger is a force multiplier in the Veteran community as a National Veterans Services Coordinator at Summit BHC. In partnership with PsychArmor, Katie helps ensure each of their Tactical Recovery Programs are certified as Veteran Ready Health Care Organizations. She serves veterans in need of residential treatment for mental health and addiction.

Through collaboration and partnership with the VA through the Community Care Network, Tactical Recovery is able to offer these services at no out of pocket cost to Veterans in some instances, if the VA services are unavailable or unable to meet the unique needs of some Veterans.

Katie also serves as the Community Co-Chair for the Colorado Veterans Community Partnership in a volunteer capacity. She has been working in this space for nearly a decade focused on Veteran mental health and addiction. Katie is an alumna of Cornell University's Sloan Program in Health Administration.