



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Update from the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Psychology Leadership Conference

May 26, 2021

*David Carroll, PhD
Executive Director*

*Stacey Pollack, PhD
National Director Program Policy Implementation*

Guide Posts for Challenging Times

- **North Star:** Engage and support Veterans in lifelong journey of health, wellbeing and resilience, utilizing a public health approach to provide mental health care and suicide prevention services to all at the right time, manner, and place with emphasis on hard to reach Veterans.
- **Core Actions:**
 1. Provide access to care that addresses Veterans needs in the time, place, and manner that works the best for them.
 2. Engage in proactive outreach to Veterans who are not connected to VHA care, particularly those at risk, and link them to services that support their mental health and well-being.
 3. Build a VHA workforce that is resilient, embraces change, and is all about customer service.
 4. Continue to restore trust in VHA by showcasing the integrity and excellence of our services as a high reliability organization.



PSYCHOLOGISTS ON BOARD

Onboard Employees, Non-Trainees, 0180 Psychology											
Fiscal Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (as of 4/30/21)
Grade	GS-11	GS-11	GS-11	GS-11	GS-11	GS-11	GS-11	GS-11	GS-11	GS-11	GS-11
	77	107	139	97	97	91	88	100	129	142	110
	GS-12	GS-12	GS-12	GS-12	GS-12	GS-12	GS-12	GS-12	GS-12	GS-12	GS-12
	231	229	281	272	334	345	315	342	393	454	385
	GS-13	GS-13	GS-13	GS-13	GS-13	GS-13	GS-13	GS-13	GS-13	GS-13	GS-13
	3,129	3,436	3,810	4,011	4,235	4,402	4,478	4586	4,650	4722	4,800
	GS-14	GS-14	GS-14	GS-14	GS-14	GS-14	GS-14	GS-14	GS-14	GS-14	GS-14
	218	238	288	339	370	388	480	554	682	765	810
	GS-15	GS-15	GS-15	GS-15	GS-15	GS-15	GS-15	GS-15	GS-15	GS-15	GS-15
	79	91	104	103	107	106	108	123	142	172	180
Total	3,734	4,101	4,622	4,822	5,143	5,332	5,470	5,705	5,996	6,255	6,285



Psychologists and Gender

GRADE	GENDER	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21 as of April 30, 2021
13	Male	1601	1568	1,544	1,536
	Female	2981	3081	3,177	3,264
14	Male	231	279	295	296
	Female	323	403	470	514
15	Male	76	84	94	97
	Female	47	58	78	83
Totals (to include GS-11 and 12)	Male	2053	2,048	2,077	2,072
	Female	3749	3,946	4,177	4,213



Psychologists and Race/Ethnicity

Race	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21 (as of 4/30/21)
White	4899	5,062	5,170	5,176
Black	389	403	417	428
Hispanic	246	265	279	277
Asian	274	294	324	329
Native American/Pacific Islander	18	18	19	20
American Indian	60	55	53	54
Other	11	19	17	18



Psychologists by Gender and Race/Ethnicity – 2021 (as of April 2021)

	GS 13		GS14		GS15	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
White	1326	2,630	266	413	93	67
Black	66	250	5	49	3	7
Hispanic	67	138	14	19	1	4
Asian	54	201	6	23		3
N.American P. Islander	6	10		2		1
American Indian	9	28	4	8		1
Other	8	7	1			
Total	1536	3264	296	514	97	83



Mental Health Hiring - Sustainment Initiative (MHH-SI)

- [MH Initiative - Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

- Requests for consultation

- Best Practices Calls

Date	Title
04/27/21	More than a Job –Perspectives and Pathways to Join Team VA
05/25/21	Data Definitions for Critical Hiring Sites
06/22/21	MH Recruitment Marketing and Candidate Sourcing Strategies
07/27/21	Health Professions Trainees Placement / VA-Trainee Recruitment Events for Mental Health Occupations
08/24/21	Perspectives on Hiring from new Mental Health Employees
09/28/21	FY21 VHA Top Shortage Occupations and how to Retain Your Employees



Mental Health Hiring - Sustainment Initiative (MHH-SI)

- Reference Documents
 - Recruitment, Relocation and Retention Initiatives
 - Diversity MH Hiring Initiative Presentation
 - [Total Rewards of VA Employment - Psychologist Careers \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
 - Memo from Executive in Charge dated October 8, 2020
 - October 8, 2020 memo from Executive In Charge “after careful comparison between the VA OIG and VHA analysis, VHA requests approval to waive the requirement to apply T5 Veterans Preference. The following five hybrid title 38 occupations are identified as critical shortage occupations by 20% of more of the health care systems by both VA OIG and VHA workforce planning (1) practical nurse (2) psychologist (3) medical technologist (4) medical support assistant and (5) diagnostic radiological technologist
 - Psychologists are identified as Shortage Occupations Approved for Waiver of Veterans Preference Consultation Requests
- VHAMHHiring2.0ResponseTeam@va.gov



What is the VA-Training Recruitment Event (TRE) model?

The standardized virtual VA-TRE model supports a streamlined and non-competitive recruitment and hiring **future forecasting** process because they are **completely hosted without posting positions on USAJobs and HPTs have up to 1 year until completion of training** *(unless required by local bargaining units)*



VA-Trainee Recruitment Events (VA-TRE) Psychology

Updated May 12, 2021
FY19 Q2 – FY21 Q1 events

Total Facility

74 unique facilities have participated
47 facilities with >1 accepted offer
18 VISNs represented

Job Interviews, Tentative Offer and Accepted Offer



Occupation of Focus	Meet and Greets	Job Interviews	Tentative Offer	Accepted Offer
MH: Psychology, MFT, LPMHC	384	139	57	26
Psychology	598	514	211	125
Total	982	653	268	151

100%
Candidates Matched!

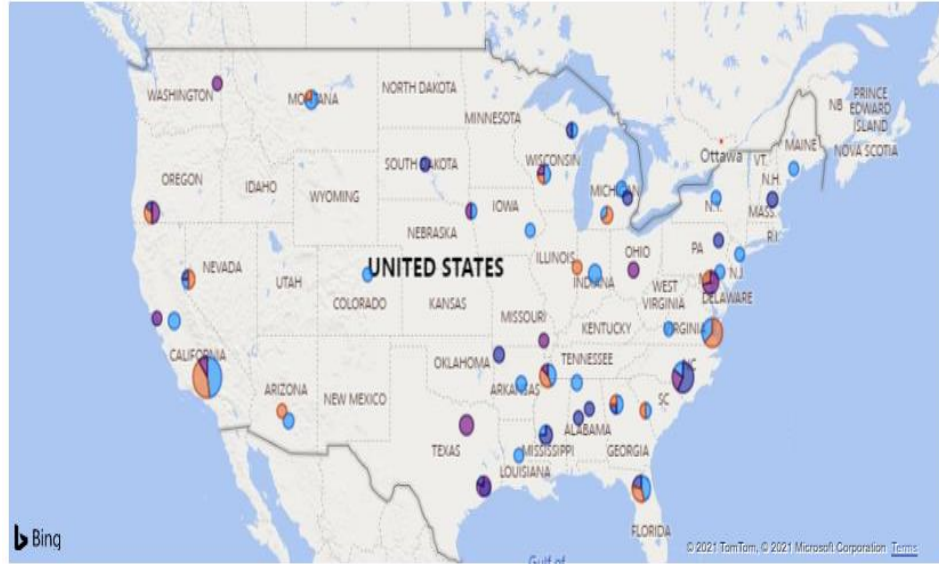
24.6%
Candidate Placement Rate

613
HPTs

151
Accepted Offers

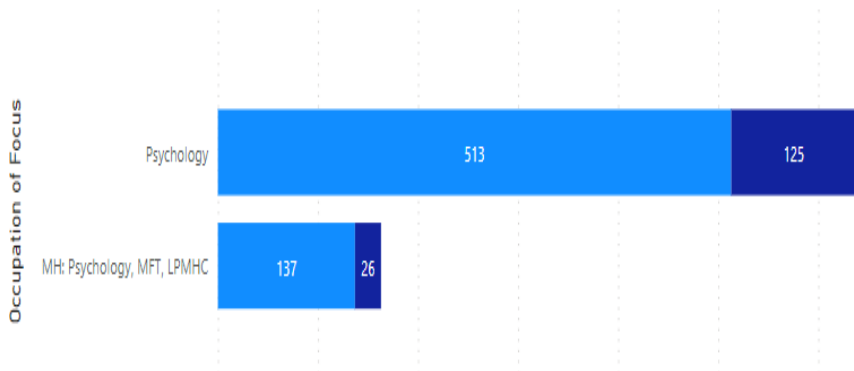
Accepted Offer by VAMC Facility and FY/Q

FY/Q ● FY19 Q2 ● FY20 Q1 ● FY20 Q3 ● FY21 Q1

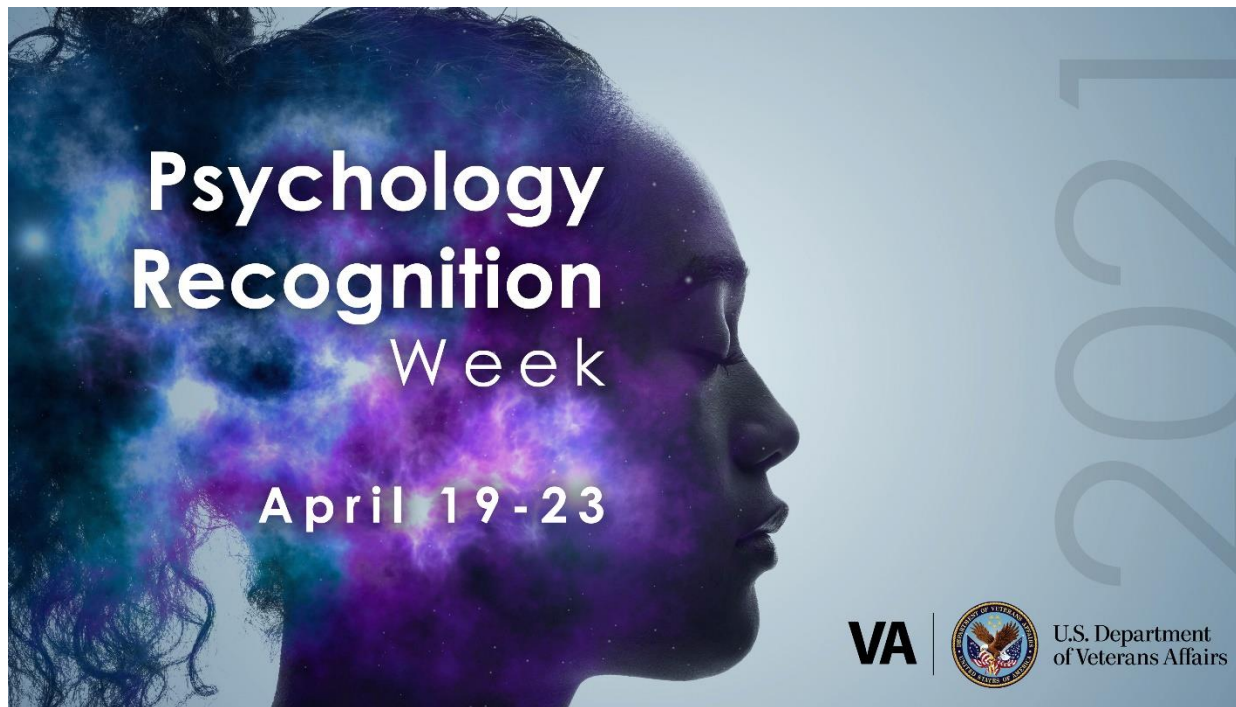


Positions and Accepted Offer by Occupation of Focus

● Positions ● Accepted Offer



3rd Annual Psychology Recognition Week



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VA Psychology Training Council Awarded 2021 APA Presidential Citation

- In recognition of the commitment to training, supervising, and mentoring psychology trainees, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Psychology Training Council (VAPTC) is awarded a Presidential Citation.
- Psychology trainees provide clinical care to Veterans and further the VA research and educational missions. Psychology training at the VA began after World War II to meet the mental health needs of returning soldiers. VA began doctoral internship training in 1946 and was instrumental in establishing doctoral training accreditation with the American Psychological Association (APA).
- Nationally, one in five doctoral interns in psychology is training in VA. VA also hosts more than 50 percent of APA-accredited postdoctoral training programs in psychology. Psychology training in VA has a huge impact on mental and behavioral healthcare both within the VA and in the nation as a whole.
- Currently, VA is the largest single employer of psychologists in the United States. Among current VA psychologists, over 70 percent were trained in VA. Psychologists play a critical role in carrying out the mission of the Department to care for our nation's heroes and their families. Not only are VA psychologists instrumental in delivering evidence-based assessments and treatments, but they also make significant contributions through research, training, program management, supervision, and leadership at the local, regional and national level.
- As the VA celebrates 75 years of excellence in education, its commitment to psychology training remains strong.
- In acknowledgement and recognition of its dedication to training the next generations of psychologists serving Veterans and the nation, I, President Jennifer Kelly, PhD, am honored to award the VA Psychology Training Council with this citation.
- <https://www.apa.org/about/governance/president/citation/dept-veterans-affairs-training>



VHA Acting Under Secretary Message (4/23/21)

- We often say we will use the weekend to rest and focus on our mental health and wellness, but with our many responsibilities it can become difficult in practice. This has been a turbulent last 15 months for us and our nation. As we close out this week, please take the time to think about your mental health and explore our [Employee Self-Care](#) resources.
- This has been on my mind more because April 19-23 marks **Psychology Recognition Week**, when we recognize the contributions of more than **6,000 psychologists who work at VA**. Psychology is a profession that grew up in VA, when after World War II we cared for an influx of more than 95,000 mental health inpatients and started training psychologists at VA. Since then, we have provided 75 years of high-quality mental health care for Veterans and exceptional training for psychologists. Thank you to the teams and employees who do this work. I am looking forward to the next 75 years.



VHA Chief of Staff message (4/23/21)

- April is Counseling Awareness Month **and this week is VA Psychology Recognition Week.** While there continue to be hopeful signs on the pandemic front with more and more adults getting vaccinated, it is important that we care for ourselves and those around us. Amelia and Emily Nagoski, authors of *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*, outline that “the three components of burnout are emotional exhaustion, decreased sense of accomplishment and depersonalization.” If you’re noticing this in yourself or in those around you, lean in, have a conversation and make a change. You are all critical to providing amazing health care to Veterans, but we need you at your best to do that. It seems we often rely on emergency tactics for rest and restoration, taking only an hour or a weekend to urgently rest as much as possible instead of building it into our daily lives. Ironically, I think this can make rest itself stressful. Over the next few weeks, keep an eye out for burnout, and try to build boundaries, rest and wellness into your and your teams’ routines.



Psychology Week Resolution

- IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Mr. TAKANO submitted the **RESOLUTION**
- Congratulating the Department of Veterans Affairs on 75 years of psychology training and expansion of access to mental health care for veterans by expressing support for the designation of April 19 through April 23, 2021, as “VA Psychology Recognition Week”.
- Whereas in 1946, the first clinical psychology trainee appointments of the Department of Veterans Affairs were made, employing over 200 clinical psychology trainees from 22 universities;
- Whereas in 1973, the Office of Academic Affairs of the Department of Veterans Affairs was established to administer all training programs of the Department;



Psychology Week Resolution

- Whereas the Secretary of Veterans Affairs carries out psychology training programs in every State and Puerto Rico and trains over 1,000 psychology interns and postdoctoral fellows every year;
- Whereas psychologists are integral to providing high-quality, evidence-based care to veterans within the Department and in the community; and
- Whereas psychologists are committed to using science and advanced clinical training to provide culturally competent healthcare to veterans from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds: Now, therefore, be it
- *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—(1) expresses support for the designation of “VA Psychology Recognition Week”; and (2) calls on the people of the United States, including interest groups, to observe the week with appropriate activities and programs to demonstrate support for psychologists of the Department of Veterans Affairs.



Additional 2021 Psychology Updates

- National OMHSP Psychology mailgroup
 - If your site is not yet a member of the VHA OMHSP National Psychology Mail group and would like to be , please have your Psychology lead/Chief of Psychology email Dr. Pollack to be added. The mailgroup, which is a compilation of local psychology mail groups was developed so that OMHSP can have a broad reach to all psychologists who work in VHA. Due to the number of psychologists in the VA, we will not be able to add psychologists to the mail group individually.
- Neuropsychology mailgroup created (at this point only for neuropsychologists)
- VHA Directive 0730 “Psychological Evaluations of Police Officers” – December 8, 2020
 - training conducted in partnership with ABPP
- VHA Directive 1165 “Leadership Positions in Mental Health” – May 12, 2021



Ongoing Activities Impacting Psychologists

- Federal Supremacy
- Psych Techs – classification issues and potential conversion to Hybrid Title 38
- Discussions regarding psychologists below the full performance level (GS-11) and requirements for Co-signatures
- New York State licensure - VA applied to see if the state will accept VA training for Continuing Education
- Developing presentation on Special Salary Rates (SSR)
 - Approximately 15 sites have SSRs for psychologists
- FPPE/OPPE
 - Waiting for a master list of clinical indicators
 - OMHSP recommends that psychologists have specialty privileges in the following areas: (1) police evaluations; (2) C&P evaluations; and (3) neuropsychology.
 - Beyond those areas, it is up to the local Psychology Chief/Lead to determine if you want specialty privileges at your facility.

