

Bridging the Gaps



Title: Empowering VAMC patients with tools for a healthier life

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The Philadelphia VA Hospital serves Veterans in and around the Philadelphia Area. Their mission is to Honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well being.

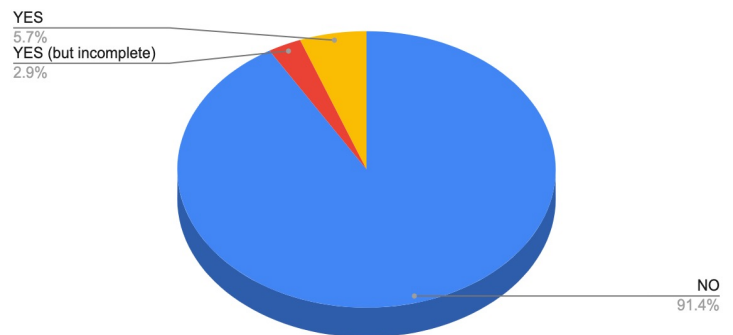
PROJECT

The VA has established a health initiative called Whole Health which aims to reimagine patient care through empowering veterans with the tools needed to take control of their own well-being. To help move this initiative forward, we assembled a "Whole Health Hotspot" table in patient waiting rooms to encourage veterans to take the Healthy Living Assessment (HLA). Once the HLA is completed, veterans received suggestions on how to improve their health and are shown what which lifestyle habits to continue doing. We then connected veterans to free VA Whole Health classes and resources to help them on their journey to better health. In addition, we followed up with patients based on provider referrals for the VA's MOVE! Weight Management program and invited patients to the orientation class.

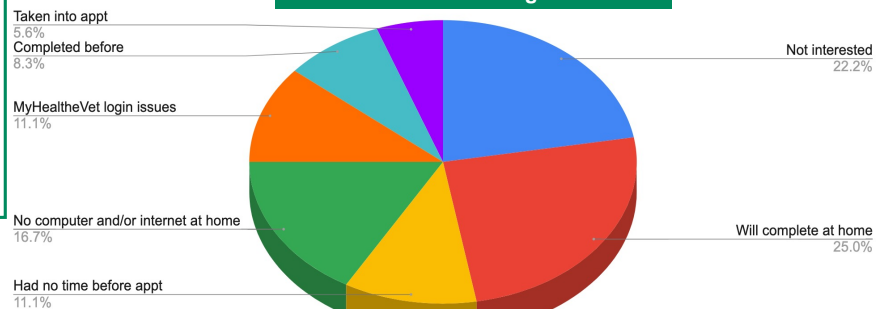
We also had the opportunity to be advocates for smoking cessation within the homeless veteran community. After educating ourselves by reading articles and assessing which resources were available to them, we compiled the most useful into an infographic. We then met with **staff** who work with homeless veterans to educate them on why quitting or smoking reduction is important to veterans, what structural barriers are present preventing veterans from quitting, and how to connect veterans to resources to help them quit.

PROJECT RESULTS

"Would you like to take the HLA?"



Reasons for not taking the HLA



REFLECTION

We had the honor of interviewing a veteran who worked in the VA system for our Storytelling Project. He struggled with tobacco, substance, and alcohol use as well as homelessness but reached out for help at a VA that changed and rebuilt his life. He now serves veterans who wish to gain employment and rebuild their lives. From his story, we learned about the resilience and camaraderie of the veteran community, which has been proven in our observations and interactions with veterans at the VA. Despite the pandemic interrupting the lives of all, including veterans, our interviewee had shared that the community did not let that stop them from making progress towards their goals in life. We saw their resilience as veterans have been attending the Whole Health classes virtually and coming into the VA for their appointments.

We witnessed their camaraderie as well. During our observations of the Whole Health classes, veterans were in a virtual group setting to learn about a specific area of Whole Health (stress management, exercise, sleep, etc.). The group setting created a supportive environment and was conducive for them to share their own issues, goals, and strategies towards a healthier lifestyle, highlighting the camaraderie to help and support others. We saw this in the waiting rooms as well when veterans of all different backgrounds were interacting with each other.